Western Story Magazine

Every Week

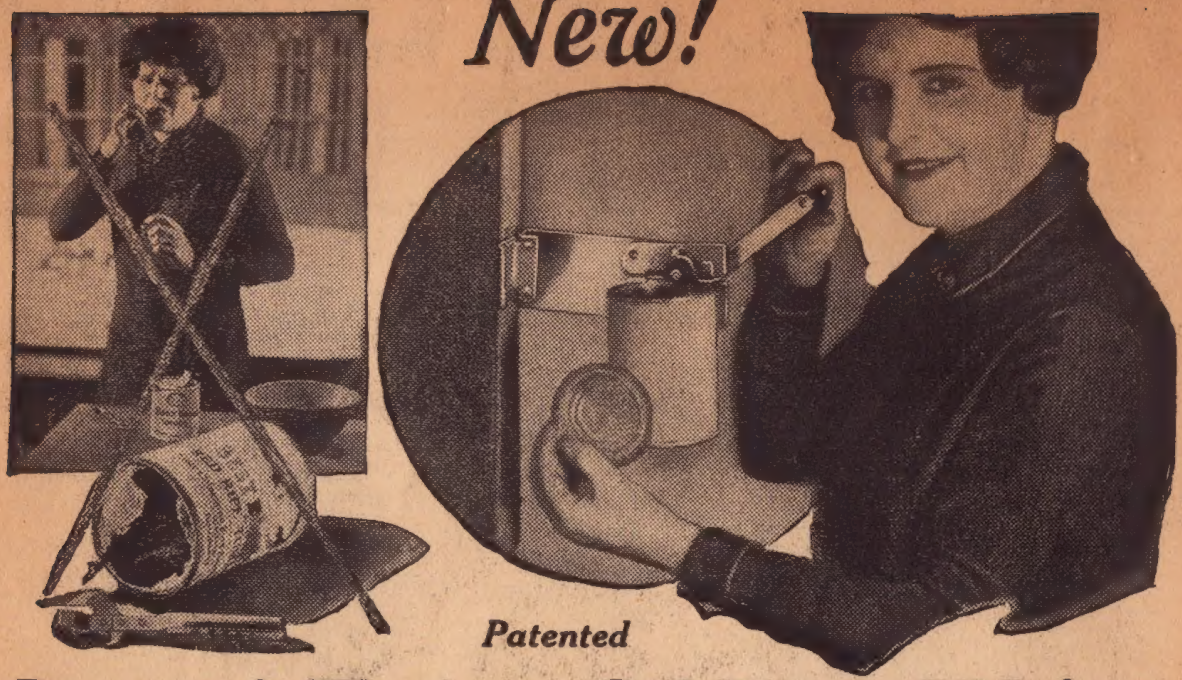
Aug. 24, 1929

15¢
20¢ IN CANADA

STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

Sliding on his haunches, the pony rattled to the bottom of the draw.

from **HAPPY VALLEY** *by* **GEORGE OWEN BAXTER**



New!

Patented

Just A Twist Of The Wrist

Banishes Old-Style Can Openers to the Scrap Heap and BRINGS AGENTS $6 to $8 IN AN HOUR

WOMEN universally detest the old-style can opener. Yet in every home in the land cans are being opened with it, often several times a day. Imagine how thankfully they welcome this new method—this automatic way of doing their most distasteful job. With the Speedo can opening machine you can just put the can in the machine, turn the handle, and almost instantly the job is done.

End This Waste and Danger

You undoubtedly know what a nasty, dangerous job it is to open cans with the old-fashioned can opener. You have to hack your way along slowly—ripping a jagged furrow around the edge. Next thing you know, the can opener slips. Good night! You've torn a hole in your finger. As liable as not it will get infected and stay sore a long time. Perhaps even your life will be endangered from blood poisoning!

You may be lucky enough to get the can open without cutting yourself. But there's still the fact to consider that the ragged edge of tin left around the top makes it almost impossible to pour out all of the food. Yet now, all this trouble, waste and danger is ended. No wonder salesmen everywhere are finding this invention a truly revolutionary money maker!

A "Million Dollar" Can Opening Machine

The Speedo holds the can—opens it—flips up the lid so you can grab it—and gives you back the can without a drop spilled, without any rough edges to snag your fingers—all in a couple of seconds! It's so easy even a 10-year-old child can do it in perfect safety! No wonder women—and men, too—simply go wild over it! No wonder Speedo salesmen often sell to every house in the block and make up to $10 an hour.

Generous Free Test Offer

Frankly, men, I realize that the profit possibilities of this proposition as outlined briefly here may seem almost incredible to you. So I've worked out a plan by which you can examine the invention and test its profit without risking one penny.

Get my free test offer while the territory you want is still open—I'll hold it for you while you make the test. I'll send you all the facts about $75 to $150 a week. I'll also tell you about another fast selling item that brings you two profits on every call. All you risk is a 2c stamp—so grab your pencil and shoot me the coupon right now.

CENTRAL STATES MFG. CO., Dept. K-2562
4500 Mary Ave (Est. over 20 years) St. Louis, Mo.

AGENTS!

Full Time $265 in a Week

"Here is my record for first 30 days with Speedo:
June 13, 60 Speedos;
June 20, 84 Speedos;
June 30, 192 Speedos;
July 6, 288 Speedos.
Speedo sells to 9 out of 10 prospects."
M. Ornoff, Va.

PART TIME
14 Sales in 2 Hours
J. J. Corwin, Ariz., says: "Send more order books. I sold first 14 orders in 2 hours."

SPARE TIME
Big Money Spare Time
Barb, W. Va., says: "Was only out a few evenings, and got 20 orders."

SPEEDO

Central States Mfg. Co.
4500 Mary Ave., Dept. K-2562
St. Louis, Mo.

Yes, rush me the facts and details of your FREE OFFER.

Name .....

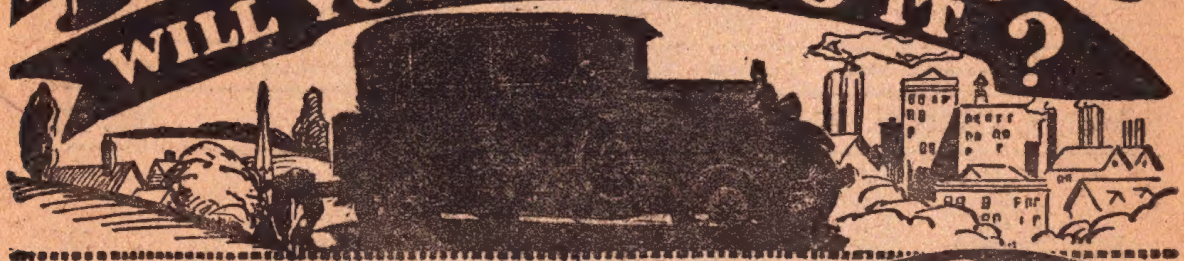
Address .....

City .....State .....

[ ] Check here if interested only in one for your home.

42 Miles on 1 Gallon of GAS

WILL YOUR CAR DO IT?



New Moisture Humidifier & Carbon Eliminator

for all Makes of Cars, Trucks, Tractors and Engines

An amazing Scientific Humidifier has been patented throughout the World that beats any ever got out. It makes engines run ALL THE TIME with the same wonderful efficiency they do on a cool moist night. It gives MORE pep and power, HIGHER top speed, eliminates hard carbon, and gives AMAZING mileage. Fords report 28 to 42 miles per gallon. Other makes (both American and Foreign) report marvelous increases of ¼ to double mileage. Some of the best records are:

	Miles		Miles		Miles		Miles
Buick	28¼	Ford (Model T)	42	Oakland	31	Pierce Arrow	22
Cadillac	21½	Ford (Model A)	40	Oldsmobile	34½	Pontiac	31
Chevrolet	41	Hudson	23½	Overland	41	Reo	26½
Chrysler	30¾	Hupmobile	24½	Packard	21¼	Star	41¼
Dodge	31½	Marmon	21½	Plymouth	29	Studebaker	29
Essex	32	Nash	30	Graham-Paige	23½	Willys-Knight	29

And Hundreds of Other Wonderful Records on ALL American and Foreign Makes

Big Profits to Man with Car Spare or Full Time

$350 to $1500 a month

1 man $4,939.66 in 3¼ months
Another $1,656.60 in 68 days
$5,150.00 in 8 months to another. BIG MONEY can be—IS being made

Fitting Motors With Vix
One man sold 8 first morning
Another sells all 3 men can install

Another's profits as high as $100.00 a day.

VIX sells itself by 8 STARTLING demonstrations—BIG, STUNNING, ASTOUNDING, DEMONSTRATIONS. Successful VIX men make MORE MONEY than they ever made before.

Free Trial TRY This New Principle Gas Saver AT MY RISK

Try this wonderful VIX Moisture Humidifier and Carbon Eliminator AT MY RISK on YOUR OWN CAR to prove that VAPOR MOISTURE (drawn from Radiator to Engine) gives you that wonderful night driving effect ALL THE TIME with MORE mileage from gas and oil—eliminates hard carbon accumulation—gives MORE power, a SNAPPIER, PEPPIER motor, FASTER acceleration, a SMOOTHER, QUIETER running engine and HIGHER top speed.

VIX will PROVE ITS MONEY SAVING MERIT on your own car by 8 DEMONSTRATIONS—conducted by yourself AT MY RISK—the most SENSATIONAL, most ASTOUNDING, most CONVINCING DEMONSTRATIONS you ever saw. If you don't find from your tests that it does MORE than I claim; return it and it COSTS YOU NOTHING. **I want wide-awake hustling, County, State, Province and National Agencies everywhere, part or full time, to make $350 to $1500 per month filling the great DEMAND for this wonderful invention wherever introduced. Write for my FREE TRIAL and MONEY MAKING OFFER. Use coupon below.**

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Inventor and Manufacturer, 799-A Street, WHEATON, ILL., U. S. A.

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FREE VIX offer Mail Now

GUARANTEED TO SAVE { 1/4 to 1/2 Gas / Carbon Cleaning / Engine Repairs **or Costs You Nothing**

WALTER CRITCHLOW,
INVENTOR and MANUFACTURER,
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Please send me without obligation or charge your FREE TRIAL and MONEY MAKING VIX OFFER.

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Address.....

Town..... State.....

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His Salary Was Raised while others were reduced

"Up to the time I enrolled for a course with the International Correspondence Schools, I had only a grade-school education. Since enrolling, I have advanced to a much better position, where my salary is nearly four times as much as I was making previously. I would not be able to hold my present position had I not taken your Course. Recently I received a nice increase, while other men were being reduced."

There could be no better proof of the value of an I. C. S. course than that. It shows that the trained man is given preference over all others and paid more money, even in slack times, if his work deserves it. It shows that there are always bigger, better jobs open for men who have the foresight to prepare for them in spare time.

Jesse G. Vincent was a toolmaker before he enrolled with the I. C. S. He is now Vice-president of the Packard Motor Car Company. Walter Chrysler, President of the Chrysler Motor Corporation, is also a former I. C. S. student. So is "Eddie" Rickenbacker, the famous flying ace, who is now in charge of sales of the La Salle car.

An I. C. S. course enabled Fred W. Southworth to leave a poorly paying job that he had held *for twenty years* and get a position as a salesman. In six months he increased his salary more than 300%.

George A. Grieble is another man who lifted himself out of the rut by spare-time study. He was a stone-cutter earning $15 a week when he enrolled with the I. C. S. He now has his own architectural and engineering business in Cleveland and his income is "between $10,000 and $15,000 a year."

If the I. C. S. can help these men to get out of the rut and make good, it can help you too. If it can raise the salaries of other men, it can raise yours! At least find out how.

The way is easy! Just mark the work you like best in the coupon below. Then mail it to Scranton today.

This doesn't obligate you in any way, but it brings you information that may start you on a successful career. This is your opportunity. Don't pass it by.

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Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, "Who Wins and Why," and full particulars about the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

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YES, right now, I'll give you groceries at rock-bottom wholesale prices and a chance to pocket $10 to $15 cash profits in a day. I'll give you the same opportunity I gave to L. C. Van Allen, of Illinois, who reports profits of more than $100 a week. You don't need any experience. Gustav Karnath, a farm laborer in Minnesota, writes, "Made $20.35 the first 5 hours." Mrs. B. F. Bagmell, of Louisiana, says she makes $10 to $15 a day in spare time. And I now offer you the same chance to **make** money and **save** money on groceries that I gave these people.

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I am President of a million-dollar Company. I distribute high-quality Groceries and other Household Necessities direct from factory to user through Authorized Local Representatives. Last year my Representatives made nearly *two million dollars!* Now I invite you to share in these profits. I'll help you make money from the very start. And I will give you Groceries and other Household Supplies at *savings of nearly one-half!* You have a wonderful chance to *make* and *save* big money.

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You don't need capital, training or experience. All you do is call on your friends and my established customers and take care of their orders. I never sell to stores. *You alone get the profit on all orders from your territory.* YOU POSITIVELY DON'T RISK A CENT. Keep your present job and start with me in spare time if you want to. Oscar Stuart, of W. Virginia, reports $18 profit in 2½ hours' spare time.

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Ford Tudor Sedan
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SEND NO MONEY

If you want to get groceries at our rock-bottom, wholesale prices—and $10 to $15 a day besides—send me your name at once. Don't miss this wonderful opportunity. **You have everything to gain—not a penny to lose.** I will give you full details of my amazing new plan without cost or obligation. I'll give you the big opportunity you've long been waiting for. So don't lose a moment. Mail the coupon NOW!

Mail This NOW

ALBERT MILLS, Pres., American Products Co.,
2246 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your new proposition that offers **Groceries at Wholesale** and $10 to $15 in a day besides. Also explain your new Ford Offer.

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Send at once, your FREE Book "Auto Facts." Also full particulars of "Job-Way" Training, and AVIATION COURSE Offer. No obligation on my part.

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Age .....Occupation .....

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*Based on the combined experiences of F. B. Englehardt, Chattanooga, Tenn.; A. F. Thompson, Sioux City, Iowa; L. D. Mathers, of E. Cleveland, Ohio, and many others.

Caught in a Rut

I wonder I put up with it as long as I did! Every day was filled with nothing but deadly routine and monotonous detail. No freedom or independence. No chance to get out and meet people, travel, nor have interesting experiences. I was just like a cog in a big machine with poor prospects of ever being anything more.

Long, Tiresome Hours

Every hour of the day I was under somebody's supervision. The TIME-CLOCK constantly laid in wait for me—a monument to unfulfilled hopes and dying ambition. Four times a day, promptly or the dot, it hurled its silent challenge at my self-respect, reminding me how unimportant I was and how little I really COUNTED in the business and social world!

Low Pay

Paid just enough to keep going—but never enough to enjoy any of the GOOD things of life every man DESERVES for his family and himself. Always economizing and pinching pennies. Always wondering what I would do if I were laid off or lost my job. Always uncertain and apprehensive of the future.

Desperate

Happened to get a look at the payroll one day and was astonished to see what big salaries went to the sales force. Found that salesman Brown made $200 a week—and Jenkins $275! Would have given my right arm to make money that fast, but never dreamed I had any "gift" for salesmanship.

A Ray of Light

Stumbled across an article on salesmanship in a magazine that evening. Was surprised to discover that salesmen were made and not "born" as I had foolishly believed. Read about a former cowpuncher, Wm. Shore of California, making $525 in one week after learning the ins-and-outs of scientific salesmanship. Decided that if HE could do it, so could I!

The Turning Point

My first step was to write for a certain little book which a famous business genius has called "The MOST AMAZING BOOK EVER PRINTED." It wasn't a very *big* book, but it certainly opened my eyes to things I had never *dreamed* of—and proved the turning point of my entire career!

What I Discovered

Between the pages of this remarkable volume, I discovered hundreds of little known facts and secrets that revealed the REAL TRUTH about the science of selling! It wasn't a bit as I had imagined. I found out that it was governed by simple rules and laws that almost ANY man can master as easily as he learned the alphabet. I even learned how to go about getting into this "highest paid of all professions". I found out exactly how Mark Barichievich of San Francisco was enabled to quit his $8 a week job as a restaurant-worker and start making $125 a week as a salesman; and how C. W. Birmingham of Dayton, Ohio, jumped from $15 a week to $7500 a year—these and *hundreds* of others! It certainly *was* a revelation!

FREE Employment Service

Furthermore, I discovered that the National Salesmen's Training Association, which published the book, also operates a most effective employment service! Last year they received requests from all over the U. S. and Canada for more than 50,000 salesmen trained by their method. This service is FREE to both members and employers and thousands have secured positions this way!

Making Good At Last!

It didn't take me long to decide to cast my lot with N. S. T. A.—and after a few weeks I had mastered the secrets of Modern Salesmanship during spare time, without losing a day or a dollar from my old job. When I was ready, the Employment Manager found me over a dozen good openings to choose from—and I selected one which paid me over $70 a week to start!

Was It Worth It?

Today my salary is $4800 greater than ever before! No more punching time-clocks or worrying over dimes and quarters! NOW my services are in REAL DEMAND with bigger prospects for the future than I ever dared HOPE for back in those days when I was just another "name" on a pay-roll!

Get Your Copy FREE

Right now the book—"The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship" — which banished all my fears and troubles and showed me how to get started on the road to success and independence—will be mailed as a gift to any ambitious man, absolutely FREE. And since there is no obligation, why not see for yourself what amazing facts it contains! Just mail the coupon now—for there is no better way in the world to invest a 2-cent stamp! I KNOW!

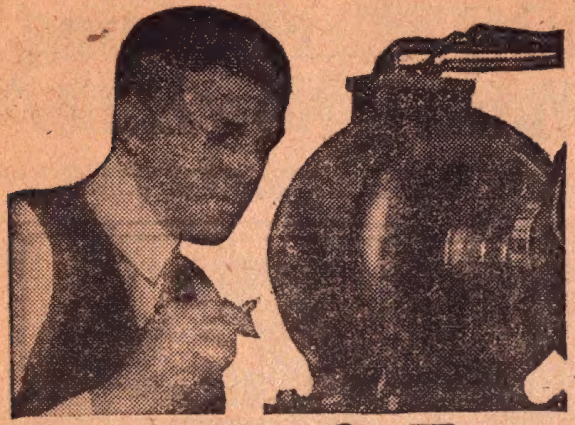
National Salesmen's Training Assn., Dept. K-582, N. S. T. A. Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

Without obligation, please send me a free copy of "The Secrets of Modern Dynamic Salesmanship." Also include full details of your training and Free Employment Service.

Name..... Address.....

Town..... State.....

Age..... Occupation.....



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Don't spend your life waiting for $5 raises in a dull, hopeless job. Now...and forever... say good-bye to 25 and 35 dollars a week. Let me teach you how to prepare for positions that lead to $50, $60, and on up to $200 a week in Electricity—NOT by correspondence, but by an amazing way to teach that makes you an electrical expert in 90 days! Getting into electricity is far easier than you imagine!

LEARN WITHOUT BOOKS--In 90 Days

Lack of experience—age, or advanced education bars no one. I don't care if you don't know an armature from an air brake—I don't expect you to! It makes no difference! Don't let lack of money stop you. Most of the men at Coyne have no more money than you have. That's why I have worked out my astonishing offers.

Earn While Learning

If you need part-time work to help pay your living expenses I'll help you get it and when you graduate I'll give you lifetime employment service. And, in 12 brief weeks, in the great roaring shops of Coyne, I train you as you never dreamed you could be trained... on one of the greatest outlays of electrical apparatus ever assembled... real dynamos, engines, power plants, autos, switchboards, transmitting stations... everything from door bells to farm power and lighting... full sized ... in full operation every day!

No Books—No Classes

No dull books, no baffling charts, no classes, you get individual training... all real actual work... building real batteries... winding real armatures, operating real motors, dynamos and generators, wiring houses, etc.

GET THE FACTS Coyne is your one great chance to get into electricity. Every obstacle is removed. This school is 30 years old—Coyne training is tested—proven beyond all doubt—endorsed by many large electrical concerns. You can find out everything absolutely free. Simply mail the coupon and let me send you the big, free Coyne book of 150 photographs... facts... jobs ... salaries... opportunities. Tells you how many earn expenses while training and how we assist our graduates in the field. This does not obligate you. So act at once. Just mail coupon.

BIG BOOK FREE!

Send for my big book containing 150 photographs telling complete story—absolutely FREE

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Address _____

City _____ *State* _____

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—hundreds of Our Customers Write

Does it pay to buy a 21-Jewel, 8 adjustment Studebaker Watch direct at factory prices? Thousands of our customers declare that their jewelers admit that the Studebaker watch is a most surprising bargain. Thousands write us that they could not purchase a similar grade watch for much more money. The coupon below will bring you details of this unusual watch buying opportunity. Send it in TODAY!

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and give you a steady income for the rest of your life if you will take care of my business in your locality. No experience needed. Pleasant, easy work can be handled in spare or full time.

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Partner may be either man or woman.

All I ask is that you have ambition and can devote a few hours each day to distributing my famous products to friends and a list of established customers. High grade food products, teas, coffees, spices, extracts, things people must have to live.

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As my partner I furnish your groceries at wholesale. Big FREE supply contains over 32 full size packages of highest quality products. Quality backed by $25,000.00 bond.

Iron-Clad Guarantee to YOU of $15 a DAY Steady Income

I don't want you to take any chances. I guarantee your income. Send coupon at once for my signed guarantee of $100.00 a week for full time or $3.50 per hour for spare time work. I go 50-50 with my partners and give valuable premiums.

I Furnish You Chrysler Coach

This is part of my outfit GIVEN to producers. Chrysler closed car to use in our business—it is yours to keep—no contest.

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C. 1929 by C. W. V. D. M.

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$36.47 in Hour and a Half

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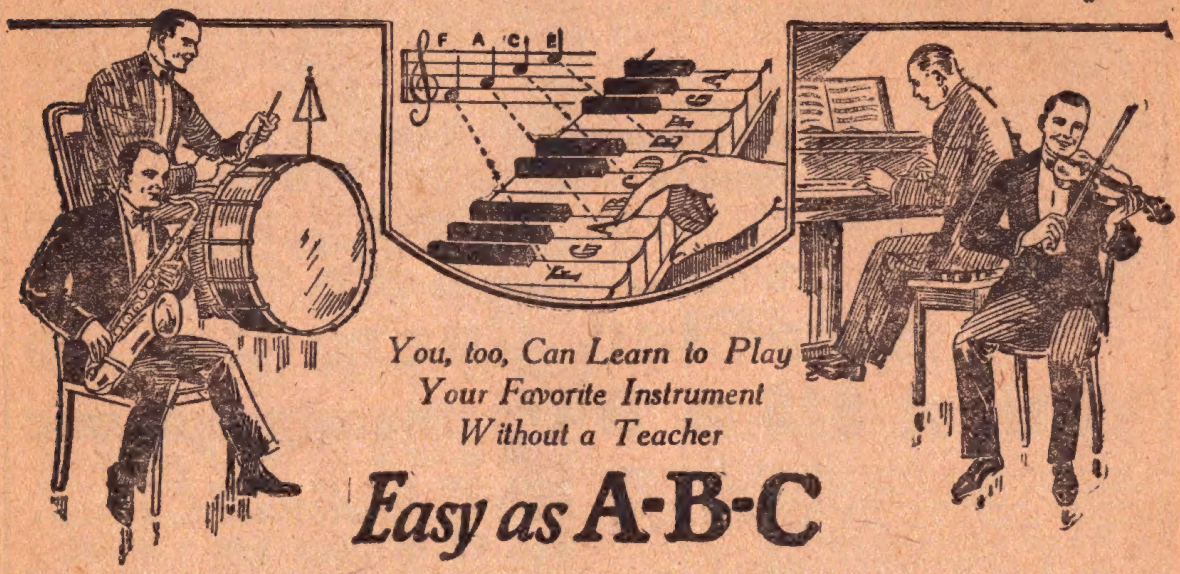

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Happy Valley

By George Owen Baxter

Author of "Strength of the Hills," etc.

CHAPTER I.

'THE PHANTOM'S BACK!

LITTLE Danny Green brought the news into Burnt Hill.

Danny had been out looking for strays, and when he came plunging back, he was riding his pinto to death. He made a little detour and paused at the house of the Dollars. He dipped down from the saddle and looked through the front door.

"Where's Tom? Where's Tom?" he shouted.

"Back in the smoke house cutting up a hog," said Lew Dollar.

"Then you go and tell him! 'The Phantom's' back! The Phantom's back! I seen him with my own eyes comin', and I cut for it. You tell Tom to clear out!"

There was much confusion in the Dollar house.

Some of them put together a pack of food. Others rolled blankets inside a slicker. Tom himself, hastily summoned from the smokehouse, rushed for the corral, but his hands were so uncertain that he could not succeed in putting the rope on the long-legged chestnut that he wanted. He had to get the help of his brother, Dick, who daubed the rope properly, though he was as white-faced as Tom, well nigh. Together they dragged the saddle onto the back of the chestnut, and in another moment, Tom Dollar was off across country, flattening himself along the back of his gelding,

and looking back with frightened eyes until the willows at the first slough were passed and he was screened from observation. Even then, he rode hard. The next day, says legend, he pulled up in Stumpy Hollow, which is eighty miles as the crow flies and more than a hundred by trail.

The good chestnut gelding was not worth a dime, by that time. He hardly could hobble into a corral, with one man leading and one beating him behind. That evening, he died; but Tom Dollar was safe for the moment, and the ride, regardless of the horse's life, was considered worth while.

Danny Green had not waited to see all these developments. He drove straight on toward Burnt Hill, with the foam flying from the mouth of his pinto and spotting Danny himself. But he knew that this was a great day for him. Not another boy in that town had achieved so much of the public eye as he was about to gain! So he stormed up the main street.

As he came to the crossing in the center of town, he was delayed by an eight-horse team which was making the turn, and while he squeezed past, Danny yelled to a line of idlers whose chairs were tilted back on the veranda of Bertram's saloon: "The Phantom's coming! I seen him! I seen him with my own eyes!"

Every man in the line stood up, agape; and then, suddenly, they grinned evilly, as some men can not help smiling when they see a great headline in a newspaper, telling of disaster fallen or about to fall upon others.

Danny Green was gone down the street like a small cyclone. He pulled up at the office from which Sheriff Bud Cross ruled the town and the countryside equitably and fearlessly.

Bud now leaned his length against the side of his front door, with his big hands in his pockets and his feet crossed, while he stared at the pattern of black and white beneath the mulberry tree in his front yard.

"Hey sheriff!" screamed Danny. "The Phantom! I seen him comin' up Fuller's Draw——"

And Danny was gone.

The sheriff gulped. He almost swallowed the large quid of tobacco which was stowed in one cheek, then he lunged back into his office and reached for his guns.

Danny had gone on in a puff of white dust which dissolved about him as he reached the Phelan home.

Mrs. Phelan was in the front yard, picking the dead flowers and the young pods off her hedge of sweet peas.

"Hey, Mrs. Phelan! Is Larry to home?"

"He's in the back yard diggin' up the potato patch," said Mrs. Phelan. "Hello, young feller! Are you gone crazy?"

For Danny had ridden through the open gate and was digging up the garden path as he rushed his horse to the rear of the house.

There he saw the powerful shoulders of Larry Phelan stooped above his spade. He was in the very act of turning a great black slice of the soil.

"Larry, Larry!" shouted the boy. "The Phantom's coming! The Phantom! I seen him in Fuller's Draw!"

The spade fell from the hands of Larry Phelan. His eyes turned toward the corral, where he could see the fine head of a brown mare, the pride of his life.

But then he remembered another head which was appearing over the side board fence of the yard. Pretty Josephine Dolan was standing on a box to watch him work and exchange the time of day.

The thought of her stiffened the back of Larry Phelan.

He said with a snarl: "Don't come jumpin' at a man's back and givin' him a start, because what do I care about The Phantom? To—— Well, let him watch out for himself, if he's comin'

back! Besides," he went on, gathering heat and color as he went on, "it's a lie! He couldn't come back this soon!"

"Maybe he's busted loose from the penitentiary," said the boy. "Or maybe he's had his term shortened up for being good!"

"Good? Him?"" grunted Phelan.

Nevertheless, his rising color faded again, and he looked very sick.

Danny Green turned his horse around, disappointed at the effect of his news.

"Well," he said gloomily. "I've told you. That's all I gotta do with it! Maybe he'll go after me for telling!"

The thought made him shudder, and he switched the tired pinto into a laboring gallop again, that took him back through the front yard and past the outraged screech of Mrs. Phelan.

"Whose phantom?" asked Josephine Dolan.

Young Larry Phelan gripped the handle of the spade and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why, The Phantom, of course!" said he. "Jimmy Fantom. You've heard about him, I guess."

"Never a word. We've only been in town six months, or less," said she.

"Well—it's a funny thing—that you ain't heard. Even if he's been five years away."

"Five years in the penitentiary?"

"Yes."

"It's a long time, Larry! Why should he have it in for you?"

"Him?" said Larry, talking more loudly than necessary, so that he might raise his own courage. "Why, they ain't no reason! Except that he's a wild one! That's all!"

He went on, breathing hard, still gripping his hands to nerve himself up to a part.

"Kids are fools, Jo. You oughta know that! I'll tell you what. I was as bad a fool as the next one, when I was a kid. Well, this here Jim Fantom, he got me and Tom Dollar into a mess of trouble. He got us to go out with him and hold up the Fullertown stage!"

"Larry!" cried the girl.

He looked curiously at her, but she did not really look horrified. Instead, her face was shining with curiosity and interest.

"There was shooting," said Larry Phelan hoarsely.

He looked earnestly at the girl again.

"How awful!" said she.

"You seem to think it was a joke, maybe?" said he.

"A joke? Of course, I don't!"

"Well, they was three men guardin' that stage. And they was all shot down. Well, it was Jim Fantom that done the shootin'. I mean, it was him that dropped 'em all. That was proved afterward. He had an old-fashioned .44, and that was how everything was proved agin' him!"

"Did he kill the three men?"

"He'd 'a' hung, wouldn't he, if he'd 'a' killed 'em all?" asked Phelan peevishly. "Nope. But he sunk a slug in the thigh of Steve Morgan, and another through the shoulder of Bill Lorris, and he drove a third slug into the hip of Jack Keene. I never forgot how Jack hollered. It hurt him terrible bad!"

"What were the three guards doin'?" asked the girl greedily. "Just settin' up, waitin' to be shot down?"

"Them? I should say not! Why was they hired except that they was good gunmen, and that they was a lot of gold dust in the boot of that stage? You betcha we was takin' our chances when we stepped out and lit into the three of 'em!"

"Weren't any of you hurt?"

"Aw, nobody but Fantom! He got a couple of scratches."

"What kind of scratches?"

"Why, one that ripped up his left forearm, and one that drilled through the thigh of his right leg."

"D'you call that scratches?"

"I mean, Jim was tough as leather.

It didn't bother him none. Why, he rode ten mile, with them wounds."

"While he was shot through the thigh?"

"Yeah. He's kind of an Indian, for standing pain!"

"And then what happened?"

"Why——" said Larry Phelan, and paused.

But he looked hungrily at the girl. She was very pretty. Twice, already, she had gone with him to dances and made him the most envied man in the town; besides, she was sure to hear the story in an uglier guise from some one else.

"It was this way. They run down me and Dollar. They found some of the stuff on us. Mind you, we hadn't figgered on stealin'! But it was like a kind of a lark. Fantom, he got us into it all!"

"Go on," said Josephine Dolan, her eyes narrowing a little.

"Well, they wanted to know which of us had done the shooting, and had the .44-caliber gun. Well, it would 've meant pretty near life, if we was caught. We said we hadn't done it, and so they said all they wanted was the man that had done the shooting. They let us tell the truth——"

"You turned State's evidence?" asked Jo Dolan.

The face of Phelan wrinkled. "You say that in a funny way," said he.

"Well," said the girl, "anyways, they couldn't get him. He must of been cached away in the hills?"

"Well, Tom Dollar told where he was," muttered Phelan, and suddenly his eyes were weighed down to the ground.

He heard a stifled gasp. Then: "If he's coming back, I suppose that it means he'll try to get you? Ain't you terribly scared, Larry?"

"Scared?" shouted Phelan with unnecessary force. "I'm gunna go down the street and meet him comin' in!"

CHAPTER II.

BRAVE WORDS.

AS Larry Phelan watched the girl disappear, his heart beat fast. He never had been so frightened in his life, but after all, he was not a coward. He was a fighting man, he knew guns, and the one blot on his fair fame was the turning of State's evidence in that unlucky affair. He had not wanted to betray his companion. As a matter of fact, it was only the grim, steady pressure of the sheriff in an all-night conversation that first had broken the nerve of Tom Dollar. And when Tom began to talk, Phelan had talked also. There was no reason why Tom Dollar should have the pleasure of going free while two men went to jail!

Besides, the third man was the one they wanted.

Sheriff Bud Cross had said: "I don't wanta bother you boys. You've had your lesson. But I wanta get that other young skyrocket, whoever he might be. He shoots too straight, and he's got too much in the bean. He needs a rest, and a dog-gone long rest. I'm the man to supply him with a free bed and free board!"

There was a touch of grim humor always, in the sheriff!

But Larry Phelan, on this day of dreadful trial, prepared to do battle for his life. And for Josephine Dolan!

Whenever he thought of her blue eyes, his heart quaked with something like homesickness, and also like the dip of a car on a roller-coaster. He decided that he would fight.

He had another good reason.

For five long, mortal years, Jim Fantom had been behind the walls of a penitentiary, turning big ones into little ones. And in that time it seemed most probable that he must have lost the inhuman cunning of his hand when the butt of a revolver was inside it. He must have lost the edge of his spirit, also. Men

got such things as the "prison shakes" in a penitentiary. They could walk bravely enough up to a crisis, but when the pinch came, they melted away like creatures of sand in a strong wind. Perhaps this would be the case with The Phantom!

It will be seen that Phelan was a reasoning man, and he finished adding up one fact to another, and to the facts the probabilities, until he was ready for the battle, since battle there must be. If he left town, he was disgraced forever, and would have to go to the ends of the earth and there try to find a new life, with a new name to wear on it.

He did not select a rifle or a revolver.

Instead, he took a sawed-off shotgun. Even with five years of absence from a gun play, it was hardly conceivable that Jim Fantom could not beat him to the draw. But he must bet that Jim's shot would go wild, and in reply, he would send a double charge of buckshot into the breast of the ex-gunman!

So Larry loaded that gun with care, and with it slung over the hollow of his left arm, he walked slowly down the street.

He passed a good many people, and every one of them had heard the news.

When they saw him coming with that gun, and marked the slow, deliberate step with which he proceeded, most of them turned straight around and began to drift behind him. One or two even hurried on ahead and passed the news along, so that a good many faces appeared at windows, and other forms hurried into doorways to have a look at him.

In this manner, Larry Phelan was put upon a stage, and his somewhat mean and bitter nature felt the stimulus and enlarged itself in the sun of public attention. He could not turn back. Presently he began to rejoice in the prominence of his place. And he could feel beneath the curve of his trigger finger the power which would quite wipe out the stain of that State's evidence which he had given five years before!

Suddenly a mustang eantered out of a side street, and he halted, mid-stride, heart thundering.

No, it was only the sheriff!

He drew rein beside Phelan. "Larry," said he, "you better go home, and stay home!"

"What for?" demanded Phelan huskily. Then his voice came to him. "I gotta right to go where I please in this here town, and I'm gunna go!" said he.

The sheriff looked him up and down in an oddly thoughtful manner.

"Well," said he, "the word is that he's comin' up from Fuller's Draw, and I'm gunna go down to that end of the town and try to stop him on the way up."

"You don't need to do it for my sake," said Phelan. "I'll take care of myself—and him, too, maybe!"

The sheriff remained quietly thoughtful.

"You're your own boss," he said at last. "I've told you what you'd better do!"

With that, he turned his horse and rode off, and the very heart of Phelan was thrilled by a murmur of applause.

Up to his side came little Sam Kruger, and touched his arm.

"That's the stuff, Larry!" said he. "You're a man to make the town proud of you, all right! You wouldn't take water from nobody, not even The Phantom!"

Larry Phelan looked down at Kruger with mingled astonishment and disgust. He knew that Kruger had hated him bitterly since a time when Phelan had referred to him as a "dancing rat." For Kruger distinguished himself neither on a cowhorse nor in a hayfield, but only on a dance floor. That remark Phelan had made in the presence of many witnesses, among whom was pretty Jo Dolan, and Kruger had taken it so much to heart that, so said rumor,

he had vowed he would have the life of Phelan for the insult!

But here he was, muttering praise and encouragement!

"Thanks," grunted Phelan. "I'm gunna blow the skunk right in two. You stick along, kid, and you'll see me do it!"

"Aw, I'll be there, all right!" said Kruger, and he rubbed his hands together, and laughed almost hysterically.

Phelan went on until he came to Bertram's saloon, and there a long line of idlers rose as though to salute him.

He paused easily on the steps. He looked up and down the line and recognized many old companions. Some of them were men whom he had accepted as equals or superiors before this day, but now he was conscious of a great superiority.

"Come in and liquor, boys," said he airily, and he waved toward the saloon entrance.

He waited until they had crowded in before him, all except one elderly man with a long, almost patriarchal, gray beard.

"Ain't you gunna have a taste, old-timer?" said Larry Phelan.

"I've passed my drinking days," said the other. He looked with bright, steady eyes at Larry Phelan. "When we get on in years, we have to keep our wits about us, you know!"

Larry laughed.

"Half a brain is good enough for any job," said he, "and the other half for red-eye!"

He went on into the saloon.

The smell of the wet sawdust on the floor, the fumes of beer and whisky in the air, the coolness, all were helping to relax the tenseness of his nerves.

He stood up to the bar and drew out his wallet.

"Let's have a taste all around, Bertram," said he.

And, for the first time in his life, he felt that Bertram was looking at him with a grave and almost covert respect as he dexterously spun the long line of glasses down the bar, so that each whirled and jingled to a stop before its appropriate customer. Then, with equal speed, he produced four bottles, and spun them, likewise, into position. They made a small thunder as they walked down the thin boards of the bar.

"Here's to you, boys," said Phelan grandly.

"Here's to the bravest man in Burnt Hill!" croaked a shrill voice in answer.

It was little Kruger, standing at the farther end of the bar and holding the glass straight and high above his head.

"Aw, quit yer kidding," said Phelan in pleased embarrassment. "Here's how!"

"Here's to the boy with the grit!" exclaimed another.

And down went the whisky in a single, reddish-brown flash.

"Another!" squeaked Kruger. "Liquor up, boys! Liquor up, and give our friend good luck!"

Once more the glasses were filled.

The second shot followed the first, and Phelan winked the tears out of his eyes. The sweet fire had burned his throat, but almost immediately he craved another.

He treated again and again.

Then he could feel all his muscles at ease. He was sure of himself at last. All these good fellows were wishing him luck. That was good! Furthermore, they believed in him! Any one could see by the melting brightness of their eyes that they were for him!

Still the bottles were rumbling up and down the bar, and his mind gave only a partial attention to the subject of The Phantom.

"After all," said Kruger suddenly, "what did The Phantom ever do?"

"Them two that he killed in Tombstone, they was both greasers," said one.

"It was an Indian that he shot in Chihuahua!"

"Harry Lord was gettin' to be an old man when the kid blew the front of his face in."

"And Lynch wasn't lookin'. He wasn't expectin' nothing when The Phantom sashayed in and shot him through the heart. He didn't even give him time to fill his hand."

"Naw! That ain't right. I was there, buddies, and he called out to Lynch to fill his hand, all right. Naw, give the fella his due!"

"Well," said Phelan, "I'll tell all of you what I'm gunna do to him and if I don't, you call me a liar!"

"What are you gunna do, kid?"

"I'm gunna give him one barrel in the heart."

"That'll make him think quick!"

They guffawed at the brutal thought.

"Then," continued Phelan, "I'm gunna step up and blow his face off with the second barrel. That's what I'm gunna do, in case that you wanta ask me!"

"Good, kid!"

They cheered him.

"You'll do it, too!"

The front door of the saloon was dashed open.

It was little Danny Green standing before him.

"Hey, hey!" he gasped. "He's double crossed the sheriff and come in from the other end of the town and—he—he's almost here now! He ain't a block away!"

CHAPTER III.

THE FALL OF PHELAN.

NO matter how prepared for battle, when Larry Phelan heard this announcement, he felt very much like the hunter of bears, when a bear starts up at the roadside under the nose of his gun. In other words, he felt a sudden desire to run.

But instantly he remembered himself. The kindly whisky remembered him, too. It threw a rosy cloud of confusion into his brain and sent warmth all through his arteries with each stroke of his heart.

He laughed in an instant, and looked bravely around him, as the hoofs of a horse came trotting down the street and stopped in front of the saloon.

But when Larry looked around him, he saw that the men were instinctively shrinking away from him, and all of them were looking toward him with faces from which the whisky flush gradually was dying out. There was neither compassion nor confidence in their eyes, but rather a touch of cold curiosity, as men look at a prize fighter about to step into the ring for combat.

He did not like that. Two thirds of his purchased confidence shrank from him. He had to snatch up the shotgun and hold it at the ready before a little of his courage reasserted itself.

He said aloud: "You wait and see. I'm gunna rip him in two and then blow his face in for him!"

In repetition and in boasting there is also a strength. And in this manner he reassured himself while a brisk step came up suddenly onto the veranda outside.

He heard a clear voice hail: "You've had a dusty trip, young man!"

"Yeah," said a voice deeper and calmer than Larry remembered the voice of Jim Fantom, "I've had to slope through a good deal of dust. Will you come in and have something, stranger? I hate to drink alone."

"Thanks," said the other, and it was undoubtedly that same clear-eyed, elderly fellow who was speaking. "I guess I won't. I'm past those days, thank you. But you'll find a crowd inside."

"Praying?" asked Jim Fantom, with a short laugh.

And suddenly it reminded Larry Phelan that as a matter of fact not a glass, not a hand, not a foot was stirring in Bertram's saloon. The brisk step drew

nearer, the door was flung open, and Jim Fantom stood before them.

He never could have been recognized!

He had gone away a boy of eighteen, he came back a man, and more than a man, of twenty-three. His face was much thinner, so that it looked rather long. Over each temple appeared a tuft of gray hair that gave him the look of thirty-five, at least; but two things remained to him that had been true of the boy who was taken away those years before—the lightly arched nose, thin and sensitive about the nostrils, and the unusually blue eyes. They seemed bluer and younger than ever, perhaps because his face was now pale, and his hair touched with gray.

Something had happened to young Jim Fantom. He had received a heating and a hammering such as turns iron into steel more strong, more supple. So that to the mind of watchful Larry Phelan there recurred an illustrative picture. He had traveled as far as Denver, on a day, and there in a museum he had seen a slender sword-blade of a curiously mottled bluish look.

"Damascus steel," said the label. "The secret of making this fine steel is now lost. The edge was so delicate that it would cut silk without drawing a thread; yet it could be struck through heavy armor and the edge remain true. The Oriental armorers carried the secret of its composition with them to the grave."

Larry Phelan remembered that caption, now, and he felt that the secret had been rediscovered, at last!

He moistened his dry lips.

These observations had been possible during the half-second that the newcomer lingered in the doorway. In that instant, his glance turned rapidly over the faces in the crowd—not a sweeping look, but one that seemed to rest studiously on every man, so that each felt it had been a mere casual survey of the others, but a particular considering of himself.

Larry Phelan was surer than the rest!

He gripped the heavy shotgun until it trembled in his grasp. If there had been so much as a gesture toward him, he would have leveled the weapon and pulled both triggers. For, after all, there was not the ice water of cowardice in his veins.

He took note of other things, too. There were gauntlet gloves upon the hands of Jim Fantom. And gloves never made for a fast draw; but the leather of these was a mere film over the fingers—"thin as a weevil's skin!"

Larry decided that he would wait. After all, it was not up to him to take the first aggressive step; he was not the man who had been wronged and must demand vengeance.

James Fantom turned his back upon that crowd, upon that trembling shotgun.

He stepped to the bar and stretched out his hand.

"Hello, Bertram," said he.

"Why, hullo," said the bartender in a wavering voice, as he touched the hand of the gunman. "I'm—we're—it's fine to have you back with us!"

"Give me a glass of beer," said Fantom. "My throat's lined with dust. And have something yourself."

He added, with a gesture over his shoulder as Bertram poured out the foaming beer, and then filled for himself a brimming glass of his best whisky, "I don't see any other men in here to drink with, Bertram!"

He raised his glass and made with it a gesture of salutation to the bartender, who was gaping with fear as he watched the semicircle of his customers.

Then he turned.

The whiplash of that insult had been drawn across every face alike, and now the blue eyes of The Phantom followed, and repeated the blow. He had at this moment a glass of beer in his right hand,

sipping slowly from it. In his left hand, he grasped the glove which he had just drawn off the right. With both hands occupied, what a temptation to draw or to pull down on him now!

The red temptation burst into the brain of Larry Phelan. The foretaste of murder made him grin like a wolf, with widestretched lips. Yet something held him back. Something like contemptuous knowledge in the eyes of this man, something unconcerned, and aloof, and pitying.

"You'd oughta try to drum up a better trade, Bertram," went on Jim Fantom. "If I had the makin' of the laws of this here State, I'd forbid saloons to let in children, and half-wits, and yaller, sneakin' boobies that ain't got the pride of a barnyard duck or the manners of a rootin' pig. I'd sweep this here sort of trash out and keep 'em out."

He made a slow gesture, beer glass in hand, and the whole line shrank before him.

There were in that crowd fellows who would have died a thousand deaths rather than submit to such insults, had they been alone. But they were not alone. Each had been subtly welded into the mass of the crowd, and, losing his individuality, had taken on the psychology of the mob, which is braver than any one man; and more cowardly than any coward. They were abashed. When one eye turned to a neighbor, it saw shrinking and horror there. Some of them even were trying to smile, as though they struggled to consider this a jest, which amused them at the expense of their companions. But it was a weak, a sickly pretense from which they could gain no real comfort.

Jim Fantom finished drinking his beer.

He turned fully around and rested his elbows on the upper edge of the varnished bar. Again he surveyed that crew, as a sheep dog surveys sheep. They were beginning to stir and shift uneasily, like fallen leaves when the wind just touches the surface of the ground.

"I came here looking for two men," said he. "Tom Dollar wasn't at home. He had heard that I was comin' to pay a little call on him."

His blue eyes flashed suddenly upon the face of Larry Phelan. There they stopped and sipped the very lifeblood of poor Larry.

"The other was Phelan, and I've found him here."

He nodded at Phelan.

"D'you know why I've come, Phelan?" he asked.

For grim action, Larry was prepared, but he was not prepared for talk. He had foreseen this affair as a sudden flashing of weapons and a roar of guns. His nerves were not attuned for a different test. So he opened his lips, but it seemed as though he only drew in icy air that chilled all his blood. He could not speak; with all his soul, he wanted another drink!

"You don't know?" said Fantom. "I'm kind of surprised and hurt by that, Phelan. I'd thought that you would of knowed that the main reason why I'd made this here long trip was in honor of you, and chiefly for the sake of havin' a little chat with you. Yes, sir, you're the main cause of me takin' this ride, just as you're the main reason of my short hair!"

He smiled upon Larry Phelan, and the heart of the latter sank again. He could not endure it any longer. He saw that his courage was running out of his boots and that if he were to strike at all, he must strike now. So he roared suddenly:

"You—Fantom—if you got anything to do, you start it now, will you? Or else, shut your face!"

That sudden roar of his shocked every man in the barroom. It shocked and flushed them with a sudden hope that, after all, they would be championed by

one of their number against the overweening manner of the other.

But Fantom did not stir a hand toward his gun.

He merely considered his enemy for a moment, and then he said: "I came back here to kill Larry Phelan, and kill him I will—but not when he's drunk!"

He walked leisurely across the floor toward Phelan.

"Now!" said Phelan to his heart. "Now I'll kill him—or now——"

But he could not stir, as it seemed. He was frozen in place until the gloved hand of Fantom reached out and plucked the shotgun away from his nerveless grasp.

"You yellow puppy, you can't make your blood red with whisky, so don't try it again. Go home and get your mother to pour some cold water over your head. And then come back!" ordered Fantom contemptuously.

Larry Phelan, white and shaking, turned toward the door.

It was far more horrible than a murder, and if the others looked upon this shaming of a grown man, and a brave man, it was because they could not draw their charmed eyes away.

"Here—you!" said Fantom.

He reached out the butt of the gun and jabbed Phelan in the back.

"Take this home with you. You'll need it later on—for rabbits!"

Phelan took the gun, and fled with a stumbling run, caring for nothing except that the doors of that saloon might swing shut and cut him off from the observance of all who had looked upon his fall!

CHAPTER IV.

ADVICE FROM JONATHAN QUAY.

OUT of the saloon, behind Phelan, came the rest of those who had drunk with him.

They wanted nothing except to escape from that scene, to wash their memory of the horror they had looked upon, if that might be, and to get on to their own homes, where they could fill their minds with familiar objects. There is nothing like the touching of well-known things by the eyes to bring back happiness and steady nerves. And fully half of those fellows were as good as the next man. Only, they had been caught in the slimy current of the crowd.

After they had scattered, the gray-bearded man on the veranda heard the bartender say: "Have another—have one on me, Jim, and make it something stronger. I got some stuff here that's the best you ever laid a lip over!"

"I'll tell you, Bertram," said the calm voice of Fantom, "I drink when I'm thirsty, now. And nobody's thirsty for whisky unless he's been facing a blizzard. I've been riding under a hot sun."

With that, he walked out onto the veranda, and sat down by the stranger. He took out a sack of tobacco, a package of brown papers, from which he peeled off one translucent filament, and then shook in the weed.

With his right hand and his teeth he drew up the string of the sack. By the time that was done, his left hand with a wonderful dexterity had smoothed the tobacco in the paper and rolled it with one clever twist.

"That's useful on horseback," said the stranger.

Young Jim Fantom turned his head and regarded his companion, not long enough for the stare to become insolent, but long enough to study his man. And he found the first pair of eyes since the penitentiary that could meet his glance with utter steadiness, without confusion, without becoming startled.

"It's useful on hossback," admitted Fantom. Then he added: "I guess I don't know your name."

"I know yours," said the gray-bearded man, "and mine is Jonathan Quay."

"Quay?" said Fantom. "Quay? Seems to me that I've heard that name, too. Quay?"

"Perhaps you have," said the other. "In some places it's not an unknown name."

"Quay?" murmured Fantom. "Hold on! You're the fellow that takes crooks when they get out of prison and helps them to go straight!"

He looked brazenly into the steady eyes of Quay.

"I've done that, too."

"Well, I'm a case for you," said Fantom. "Straighten me out if you can!"

"Do you need me?"

"Well, take a look! Three years in the reform school—and five years in prison. And I'm twenty-three. I guess you're as high as that in arithmetic?"

He laughed, and there was a sneer in his laughter.

"You never were crooked," said Quay. "You don't need me!"

The other jerked his head around. "Say that slow!" he requested.

"You went to the reform school," said Quay, "and to the penitentiary. They've done your business for you. They've made you a straight man."

"The law!" said Fantom, and his lips smiled over the gleam of set teeth. "It's done a pile for me, all right; it's given me board and lodging for eight years!"

"It's done more than that. It's given you a straight eye, as well as a straight mind. It's given you a strong hand, and steady nerves, and a sense of what's right. Otherwise, you would have killed young Phelan, a moment ago."

Fantom smiled again, and again there was no mirth in his smile.

"Whatcha think?" he asked. "That Phelan's better alive or dead, just now?"

"Not for this section of the country, of course. But he can go away with a lesson inside him and start his life in a new place."

"Aye, he could do that. By your look of it, I'm a kind of a reformer, eh?"

"You've reformed Phelan," said the other, "if he only lives long enough to profit by it!"

"Why, ain't he apt to live long? I don't think that he'll come back to me for trouble!"

"No," said Quay. "He won't do that. But he'll be apt to have trouble other places. After this day, there's not a ten-year-old boy that wouldn't stand up to Phelan. He's taken water, and even the children will laugh in his face! His nerve is broken, and every one knows it."

"I hadn't thought of it in that way," muttered The Phantom.

"So that you're in real danger, now," said Quay.

"Danger of what? Of Phelan and Dollar?" He laughed, and there was a snarl in the laugher. "Danger that the law may do you its first injustice."

"Its first, eh?"

"You deserved the reform school," said Quay, without heat but with perfect conviction. "You deserved it, because you called every day wasted that didn't see you in a fight. It was bad enough when you were ten, and gave all the boys of the town black eyes and bruised noses. But at fifteen you were hitting hard. You were breaking bones, now and then. And when you made your little tour down to Tombstone and came back with a few scalps——"

"That was a fair fight."

"No fight is fair that a man puts himself in the way of," said the other almost sternly.

Young Fantom looked askance at him, but did not answer.

"You got the reform school. It was good for you. For three years you had to submit to authority. In a way, you really liked it. Is that right?"

Fantom rubbed his chin, and a puzzled frown appeared on his face.

"You seem to know a bit about me," said he.

"I was once a young man," said Quay gently. Then he went on: "After reform school, you had only a few months. In those months you killed an Indian in

Chihuahua, you killed Lynch, and you killed Harry Lord. Both of them famous gunmen."

"They'd asked for trouble."

"And you didn't turn the other cheek. Very well. It wasn't for that that the law sent you to prison. Afterwards, you shot down three guards and robbed a stage."

"And got the only punishment! The other two sneaks, who'd persuaded me into the job, and then had got out——"

"Persuaded you into it?"

"Why, they dared me. I wouldn't let a dare go by—not in those days!"

"Then the law sent you to prison. Well, the other pair weren't worth bothering about, but the law has hammered you into good metal, now!"

"If that metal was a steel knife, it would like to be between the ribs of the law!" said the boy. "I've had my torture!"

"Because you insisted on bumping your head against the stone walls, when they first put you in prison. As soon as they thought you had straightened out, they cut down your sentence!"

"It was the warden," said the boy. "There was one man with a heart as big——"

"He was the same warden who made life hard for you at first, I believe."

At this, Fantom was silent for a moment, only to say, afterward: "Look here! How do you know about these here things? You seem to know the whole book of me!"

"It made interesting reading," said Quay, "and, as you know, my business is trying to help boys who have been turned out of the prison gates—trying to help them onto a steady path!"

Fantom frowned.

"Well," said he, "kind of you to take an interest. But I'll paddle my own canoe."

"You'll paddle it into a rapids, unless you get out of this town," answered Quay.

"I will?"

"You will. Dollar's cut and run for it. But if somebody kills your friend Phelan inside of the time you're in town, who'll be blamed for it?"

"You mean me?"

"If you were in the sheriff's place, who else would you suspect?"

"Ah, dang the sheriff!"

"On the contrary, Bud Cross is an excellent man and wants to give every one a perfectly square deal! But he's liable to human error. Mind you, the law does make a few mistakes. So far, not in your case. You can't complain of five years, after shooting down three men and stealing nearly a hundred thousand dollars! But the law will certainly take you by the collar if Phelan is harmed."

The boy set his teeth and the muscles at the base of his jaw stood out in a white spot.

"Well——" he said at last, but could not find words for the sullen rage that burned within him.

"You'd better go," said Quay again, gently.

"I'm danged if I'll go!" said the boy.

"Very well," said Quay. "I knew that you wouldn't."

"Why did you know that?"

"Because gray hairs don't make an old mind!" answered Quay. "Heaven be with you, my boy!"

Fantom turned back and laid a hand on the other's shoulder.

"You're a strange one to me," said he, "but you sound like a straight one. I'm gunna think over what you say. Maybe I'll leave. But, after all——"

He paused and looked up and down the street.

The blacksmith shop had been long silent, but now the mellow clangor of hammer faces on yielding hot iron began again. Smoke was rising from many chimneys. The life of the town once more was rippling on after a slight disturbance.

"After all," said the boy huskily, "this here is my town. I know it. For five years, I've been hungering after it. I've been looking at my picture of it. I've been listening—to the barking of its dogs, even. Heard 'em in my dreams." He made a gesture of pain and rage. "Back I come, and they're all snarling at me from the first step. It's—it's sort of hard!"

He sighed. "I'll look it over, once, and then maybe I'll take your advice!"

"Young man," said Quay," "I'm "I'm afraid you're like the wife of Lot. I hope to Heaven that I am wrong. Good-by!"

CHAPTER V.

JOSEPHINE DOLAN—AND BILLY.

LEAVING the veranda of the saloon Jonathan Quay started down the street, but Jim Fantom remained behind, and there he sat until the sun hung low in the west, and a breath of coolness stirred across the town, raising the dust in little whirlpools, here and there. Then he sauntered away, still thoughtful.

He made the round of the place from one familiar spot to another. He circled back to the old swimming pool, to which the boys used to sprint after school, undressing on the way, hungry for the honor of being first into chilly water.

He had won that honor time and time again. He had discovered, twice, new routes which saved precious seconds of time and brought him in first. Now, as he wandered through the woods and the brush, he saw that his newly discovered ways were well-beaten trails; it made him feel old and time-worn!

At the edge of the pool all was altered. The pool itself had shrunk to a quarter of the size it had seemed to be; the great black rock was dwindled to a little stone; the branch of the willow from which they used to dive was a crooked, bark-worn limb. The very trees, that once had seemed so tall, so dark, so awful, now were spindling second-growth!

He left the swimming pool and came back to the town through the Egan pasture, where he had ridden the roan mustang for a bet of fifty cents and had been thrice thrown, and yet had conquered, and then had gone home and fainted on the doorstep.

He passed next through the woods behind the Lander house, pausing in the open space among the scrub oaks. In that mystic circle, on a moonlight night, he and "Chip" Lander had fought their famous battle. He was thirteen and Chip fifteen. He had been long king of the smaller boys, with Chip the recognized authority among the older. But at last ambition made him attack even the great Chip.

One dreadful hour they battled here. He had pommeled the face of Chip furiously, but at last superior age and strength told. He could remember vividly the finishing punch, he had gone numb, his arms hanging at his sides. It landed on his temple, that driving fist. He fell into darkness and wakened on the knees of Chip, who was saying fine things about him.

"Next year, you'll be able to beat me to a pulp," said Chip.

A fine fellow, Chip Lander! The heart of Fantom warmed as he thought of the boy, who had gone off onto the great range and was heard of no more in Burnt Hill.

He climbed to the top of the hill itself, went by the house of the Purchasses—the rich people of the town—and looked down on the huddling lights of the village. In his boyhood he had stood here and thought it was like a sea of illumination. Now it seemed to him that the long main street, with its irregular fringing of lights, was like a ship at night, wandering among the dark hills of the sea.

In the late dusk he passed down again into Burnt Hill. He passed the cool

whisper of sprinklers, spinning on the lawns, the smell of cookery hung drowsily in the air; now and then a breath of garden flowers rose up before him.

He was very sad. Twice he passed men on the street, and when he was close enough to be recognized, they sidestepped, as though they had seen a prowling wild beast.

A youngster, squealing with delighted fear, burst out of a garden gate before him and darted into the street.

"Billy Dolan," cried a girl's voice, "you come right back here! Dad'll spank you within an inch of your life!".

"I don't care!" crowed Billy, from the delicious deep dust of the street.

The girl suddenly emerged in pursuit. Fleet was the boy, and dodged like a rabbit, but the girl was arrowy swift. And as a greyhound speeds gracefully after the rabbit until at last the little hunted thing will swerve back into the waiting jaws, so the boy swerved into the arms of his sister at last.

He struggled furiously.

"Leave go! It ain't fair to grab me by the ear! I'll hit you, Jo!"

"If you hit me," said Jo Dolan, "I'll turn you over and spank you, right in front of that man who's standing and watching you make a silly thing of yourself!"

"You can't! You dassn't!" protested the lad.

"Can't I, though!" said she.

They passed into a shaft of dim lamplight that streamed through the door of the house, and Fantom saw that she was able to do as she threatened. In her round arm there was strength enough to rein a bucking mustang or to swing an ax. She stepped like a deer, lightly and proudly; there was both laughter and sternness of battle in her eeys.

So she dragged the culprit to the front gate, and thrust him in.

"You go upstairs and wash yourself in a jiffy," said she, "and get ready for supper, and I won't tell on you. But if you don't, I'll catch you again and do what I promised!"

Billy Dolan sulked up the path, head down, hands in his pockets, dark schemes of revolt and vengeance in his mind.

"He's a handful!" panted the girl to Fantom.

"I bet he is," said he.

"Another year and he'll be too much for me."

"Not if you get a good ear-hold."

She laughed.

"He's a rascal," she said affectionately. "You're a stranger in town, I guess?"

"Yeah. I just came in. Looks like a good town to me."

"It's pretty dead, but I guess it's all right. We been stirred up to-day, though."

"That so?"

"Sure. Haven't you heard?"

"I just sloped in."

"The Phantom's come back!"

"Who's he?"

"Why, Jim Fantom! You must of heard."

"A long time ago, maybe."

"Yep. He's been in the penitentiary for five years. But now he's come back to get even."

"For what?"

"He really got a bad deal, in some ways, I guess. But he's a real mean one now."

"I hope I don't meet him," said Jim.

"You better not. He's the kind that would just as soon kill a man as take a drink of water. He's a terror, I guess!"

The Phantom was silent, as she continued: "But I'll bet if I was a man, I wouldn't let him bully me around, the way that he does the others. I'd rather die first!"

"I bet you would," said The Phantom.

"Well, so long. It's supper time. I

hope you like the town!" She went to the gate, and opened it.

"So long," said he. "What's your name, might I ask?"

"Me? Oh, I'm Josephine Dolan." She added: "Who are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm Jim Fantom," said he.

He took off his hat and stepped a little closer, so that she could see his lean, hard face, and the gray tuft over each temple.

"My gracious!" she whispered, and shrank away from him. But she came bravely back.

"I guess I've said some pretty hard things to you, Jim Fantom. I'm sorry about that."

"I don't mind," he replied. "Sometimes a bad start makes a good finish!"

"Yes, yes," said she. "I was foolish to talk so free about a man I'd never seen."

"You're going to see me again," said he.

"I hope so."

"If you don't mind people talking about that."

"I wouldn't mind. Jiminy!" exclaimed the girl. "I should say that I wouldn't!" And she laughed. She had come still a little closer, full of excitement and invitation.

"Drop around to-morrow," said she. "We're going up-country the next day."

"Thanks,' said Fantom.

They shook hands; in hers, he observed a faint tremor.

"Maybe I'll be going up-country, too," said he.

The pleasure went out of her eyes and her face grew cold; he realized as he turned down the street that he had gone much too fast. But still, though he shook his head, he was hardly sorry. Perhaps it was because he had been put away for the five years, but it seemed to him that he never had seen another like her!

She was fresh as the spring, delicate as a flower, strong as whipcord. What a woman to make a wife in this man's country!

Those thoughts opened the mind of Jim Fantom, opened his heart, as well, so that when he heard the half-stifled bark of a revolver, somewhere behind him, he hardly noticed it.

He went on slowly, filled by his thoughts, until he came to the hotel. There he lingered by the troughs, watching a twelve-mule team taking water, thinking idly how differently a thirsty horse drinks. A mule is dainty; a horse will plunge in above his nostrils, eating the water, as it were!

Then he went in.

It was supper time. A dozen men sat at the long table in the dining room, and he took the place at the foot, nearest the window. Yet he was rather doubtful of that window which yawned upon his back. There were men in this town who would think nothing of putting him out of the way with a bullet from behind.

However, once seated there, he would not change. He shrugged his shoulders at the danger and settled himself to his food.

The men at the table were all afraid. It was as though a sudden cold wind had blown upon them, for they all began to frown and stare at their plates with fixed eyes. They looked not even at one another, except for a traveling salesman at the farther end of the table. His voice was free and easy enough. He talked with such appreciation of himself, that as he told his stories, he swung from side to side, so as to peer past the big circular-burner lamp and read the expressions of his audience.

Then his nearest neighbor muttered something. At that, the salesman was silent suddenly. His face turned white; and Jim Fantom sighed gloomily. It would always be like this, and between him and the rest of the world there existed a great wall that towered to the sky.

CHAPTER VI.

"STICK 'EM UP, FANTOM!"

EVEN the waiter was ill at ease. When he offered the stewed prunes to Fantom and received a curt refusal, he actually jumped, and Fantom lost his patience.

"Great gosh, man," said he, "I ain't goin' to eat you, am I?"

"I dunno!' stammered the waiter. "I sure hope not, sir. Can I fetch you something else?"

"No," said Fantom, and his voice was a groan of protest.

He gave his attention to his second cup of coffee. It was piping hot, and he had barely sipped of it when he was aware of a jerk of the body and a straightening of the man next to him.

He looked up in turn, and there stood Sheriff Bud Cross in the doorway, with a long Colt in either hand, bearing full upon him.

"Stick 'em up, kid!" he said.

"What's the matter?" asked Jim Fantom.

"A dead man is the matter," said Cross. "You dolt, to think you could drop Larry and get away with it! Get up them hands, will you?"

Slowly the hands of Fantom mounted.

He was bewildered, amazed. But dimly in his mind he seemed to hear again the boom of the revolver shot as he walked down the street. He thought of other things, too. The girl could swear that, just before, she had seen and talked to him, and her house was near the house of Phelan. That would make perfect the case against him.

Not penitentiary, this time, but hanging would be the word!

"You there, Clauson," barked the sheriff's voice. "Stand up behind him and lay a gun agin' the back of his neck!"

Clauson did not move.

"Hurry up," said the sheriff. "What you scared of?"

Clauson, unwillingly, rose.

"This ain't of my choosin', sheriff," said he. "But I suppose I gotta do what I'm told."

So he rose, drawing his gun, but as he did so, and stepped behind the chair, it seemed to Jim Fantom that he saw a chance through which he might escape.

His feet found the cross-beam beneath the table, and suddenly he thrust out with all his might.

The table shot over on its side, bearing down two men before it. Their yells mingled with the crash of dishes. The lamp was dashed to bits and the room flooded with darkness just as the sheriff let off both guns.

The sing of one bullet fairly kissed the ear of Fantom and the windowpane behind him crackled. The other shot thudded into the wall. But, in the meantime, that thrust of his feet had hurled him strongly back against Clauson.

The man went down, with a groan of fear, but Fantom had him not in mind.

The sheriff was his danger.

He could see the big man side-step out of the lighted square of the door, and Fantom went for him across the floor, crouched like a cat. Out of the darkness at the sheriff's feet he rose at the tall man, gun in hand. It would have been a simple thing to split the forehead of Bud Cross with a bullet, then, but that was not in the mind of Jim Fantom.

The long barrel of his Colt rang along the head of Cross, and the sheriff went down on both knees.

Another man would have been knocked prostrate, but the fighting instinct of the sheriff held him up on his knees, shouting hoarsely to the others to block the way to the door. For his own part, the blow had blinded him, and he dared not shoot into the darkness that covered his eyes.

But no one blocked the door. Men would rather have run into the path of a charging tiger, at that moment. They

saw the slender form of Jim Fantom slither through the doorway and disappear. The clerk in the lobby dropped with a groan of terror behind his desk as he saw the gun in the hand of the fighter. Two others, agape, flattened themselves against the wall and thrust their arms stiffly up over their heads.

But Jim Fantom went past them, unheeding. Once more it seemed to him that men could be like sheep—pitiable, cringing sheep, who tremble when they see the sheepdog.

He darted down the back hallway, burst through the rear door, and sprang to the ground without touching a step.

The stable was just before him. He groaned with his haste as he saw the door closed. It required a long heave and pull before it slid open, the rusty wheels grinding above his head.

But he was inside. He found the bay pony. By the light of a lantern on the wall, he noted the sweat streak, white along its hips, and wondered how much he had taken out of it during that day's ride!

However, he had the saddle on its back before the thought was completed.

Left and right stood sleek speedsters, long-legged, dainty, the very animals for him in this crisis, but to take them would mean what in his eyes was worse than murder—horse-stealing!

He heard the rear screen door of the hotel bang rapidly. They were pouring out after him, and they would guess where he was. He flung himself into the saddle and reined the pony back.

No matter how tired, it had enough hot blood in it to rise to a great moment, and it was gathered under him like a tightened watch-spring as he turned its head toward the door.

The passage way behind the stalls was low. The rafters reached down just above his head, but he threw himself along the side of the mustang like an Indian, his revolver thrusting out under the neck of the animal.

In that way, like a storm he broke out of the door of the stable. He saw men streaking toward him, gun in hand. At sight of him, they stopped and threw themselves to the ground, except for the tall form of the sheriff, who stood erect and dropped his guns on the fugitive.

"I'm gone!" said Fantom to himself, and began to shoot beneath the reaching neck of the pony, not at any target—the jerking of the pony's gallop would have made it impossible, probably, to hit anything—but merely in the air, in the hope that the flashing of his guns might shake the nerves of the others.

They could not shake the nerves of the sheriff, he well knew, but Bud Cross was not half himself. The blow on the head still kept a veil over his aching, burning eyes; sharp pains stabbed his head; he was shooting at a double image, as it were, and as the rider darted past him and around the corner of the hotel, he cast down his guns with a groan of disgust.

Then his voice rose like a clarion. Fantom, rounding into the street so fast that his horse skidded in the liquid dust, heard the voice:

"Hoss and saddle, every one of you, or Burnt Hill is gunna be a laughing-stock!"

Jim Fantom heard no more, except distant shoutings, and the banging of doors, and the noise of windows slammed up. He sped on down the street, with the acrid dust fanning up like moth wings into his face. So the last lights shot past him on either side, and the comfortable darkness of the open country received him into its breast.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO PHANTOMS?

HE kept up full speed until he was between the two hills just east of the town. Then he turned in a wide detour, and galloped furiously to the west.

He was in a draw behind the hills, a hollow which the water filled with a rush during the floods in the spring of the year, when the higher snows were melted by the first rains. The bottom was chiefly sand and small pebbles, such as would not give out the noise of a falling hoof; but here and there the pounding feet of the bay hammered on the surface of a rock and the sound echoed up and down the draw like a rifle shot.

However, this was his best way, as it seemed to him.

Finally, he saw before him the woods. He entered them, turned, and looked back at Burnt Hill.

The very lights of the town seemed to be trembling and winking in excitement. He heard a roar of distant voices; he heard a pounding of hoofs, distinctly, but the whole flood of the sound of men and horses was streaming away to the east.

Now let them burn up their speedsters, their half-breds and their thoroughbreds, the pride of the town! Let them ride them to death on the eastern trail, while he drifted comfortably to the west!

He drew the pony back to a walk. He even leaned and loosened the cinches of the panting little beast, so sure was he of himself. And so the big, dark trees walked past him. Now and again, he saw the bright faces of the stars above him, in glimpses, they, too, seeming to pulse slowly to the rear as the horse walked on.

His nerves were relaxing. His spirits began to rise. As for the killing of Larry Phelan, it was what was coming that young man's way. His chief regret was that he had not accomplished that feat himself. Only, in fair fight, of course!

But it occurred to him, suddenly, that there was hardly such a thing as a fair fight for him, from this time on. He had killed too many, the law had put a mark upon him, and no matter whom his bullets touched, no matter what the provocation, he was from this time forward branded with murder if a man fell before him.

He knew that Bud Cross was a fair and reasonable man. But Bud Cross had not dreamed of doubting that the killing of Larry Phelan lay at the door of Fantom.

So, gradually, he saw the life that lay before him. He could not exist inside the law; he must live outside of it. They trembled before him with a sort of natural detestation. Well, then, let them tremble not because he was a sheepdog, but because he was a wolf.

Bitterly he made that decision, with a profound sorrow in his heart that he beat back, and would not consider.

There was the girl, at the bottom of it all. Somehow, she seemed to have slipped quietly into his mind, like an idea which he had known long before. She was as familiar to him as the stars are familiar in the face of the sky. The very sound of her voice was like a well-known thing!

He felt that if he could have seen her a second time, the illusion would have vanished. But as it was, she had stepped into his thoughts along with the cool of the evening, the whisper of the falling water on the lawns, the breath of the gardens. There had been light enough by which to see her beauty, but not the flaws. He had heard her speak. He had heard her laugh. He had seen her eyes shine.

So that she remained to him partly real and partly ideal. She was made out of his wishes, like a child's day dream, but also there was about the image of her something which had been made outside of his imagination. Then he told himself again, and cursed aloud as he said it, that this absorption in her was merely the result of his five years of confinement behind stone walls.

He kept the bay pony on at a steady

jog, up hill and down dale. Then he came to a bright-faced lake in the middle of the woods, and into the wood dropped a zigzag stream, lying like a frozen bolt of silver lightning along the mountainside. He could see that the pony's head was beginning to droop. Therefore, he halted and made camp for the night, here. He found a good strip of pasture for the mustang. He had in his saddlebag a feed of crushed barley for it, and when he curled himself up for the night, he assured himself that his horse would be fit for another long march on the morrow.

As for his own empty stomach, that was a matter of small importance. He drew up his belt a notch when he rolled into his blanket. He took up another notch in the morning, and all was well. For that matter, he had been accustomed from boyhood to living much like a camel, and laying up in fat times for the lean days ahead.

When he wakened, the mustang was neighing softly—an inquisitive whinney, as it were—and tossing his head as he look the east through the trees.

Fantom got out of his blanket sleepily, and looking down through the tree trunks in the same direction, he beheld a dozen riders coming out of the woods and riding by the edge of the lake, with their images beside them in the still water making another cavalcade. The leader stopped to give his mount a swallow of water. That was Bud Cross. Then reining the head of his horse away from the water, the sheriff waved straight toward the trees where Fantom was hidden!

Fantom was madly at work, by this time. He dragged saddle and bridle onto the gelding, and kept chucking him under the jaw to irritate him. In that way he could keep the little fellow from whinneying to his kind.

Yet they were not his kind. Would they had been! He was a stump-legged little rat, as much at home on rough trails as a mountain sheep, and he could jog or lope endlessly; but behind him were the blooded speedsters of Bud Cross. It seemed to Fantom that he could now remember having heard, while he was in the pententiary, that Bud Cross had induced the county to give him a selection of fast runners of proved endurance. The allowance had been made, and after that, he ran down criminals as a good pack of wolf hounds will run down wolves.

Here they were behind Fantom now! It seemed to him that he never had seen horses with necks and legs so long!

And now he was in the saddle and twisting the bay snakelike into the deeper recesses of the woods.

He was off in a moment to a considerable distance. Behind him the voices of the pursuers died off faintly, like bells that are carried on the wind, dying and coming again.

There was a small open glade beneath the slope of the hill, and this he ventured to cross, confident that the woods from behind would screen him from any observation.

He was almost across, and entering the farther side, when something rattled through the foliage before him, and immediately afterward the clanging report of a rifle smote sharply against his ears.

They had seen him, after all!

He gave one fleeting glance to the rear, and made out in three or four places the shadowy forms of the long-striding horses that worked behind him.

He must keep to the rough ground, if he hoped for life!

So, to the rough ground he kept, edging higher along the slope until like the handclap of a giant at his very ear, a Winchester spoke from a brake beside him.

He reined the bay headlong down the slope, through scattering brush and trees, and saw three men flying behind him. And to the right, and before him, other guns were popping. Yet he

seemed to bear a charmed life. Perhaps it would have been wiser to remember that the shooting had been done by men on horseback, than which there can be no more inaccurate markmanship!

He sliced off to the left, but always it was downhill, and always they were gaining behind him. Thoroughbred though they might be, these man-hunting horses knew all about their business of running across country. They did not let up. They came on so freshly that Fantom desperately conjectured that the sheriff must have sent out from the town a relay of fresh horses to take up the work on the trail.

Never had the sheriff worked at any trail as he would work at this one, as the boy well knew. There was a broad white bandage around the head of Bud Cross, and that seemed to Fantom like a battle flag which the sheriff could not forget.

It was quirt and spur, now, cruelly fed into the sides of the bay gelding to keep him going.

He would not last long at this pace. His short legs that could jog patiently all day long had not the stroking power to match against the sleek, bounding forms behind. But Fantom dodged him through a dense tangle of brush; then down a sheer slope, sliding on his haunches and braced legs like a bear sliding down a snow bank.

He rattled down a twisting gully at the bottom of the draw and, looking back, saw the posse come out of the upper edge of the woods, and scoot down the slope one after another, enveloped in a cloud of dust and kicking pebbles in noisy showers before them.

It meant death to Fantom, this fine riding, but an unwilling admiration rose in his heart. It seemed impossible that the whole number of the posse should have been able to follow that route across country. And, in fact, he numbered only eight who made the descent. Two more vainly urged their mounts forward on the edge of the slope, but could not make them take it.

In the meantime, there was nothing to do except to ride the bronco for all that it was worth, hoping for some gully branching from the main one down which he might dodge again. He could hear them shouting encouragement. They were whooping one another on as if they were hunting a bear; and his lips began to curl with ferocity.

The draw swept around a bend, and as the turn was made, there started out before him a rider on a bay horse who drove at full speed down the canyon.

Fantom looked at him as at an illusion of the eye. The rider was a man dressed in every respect as he was dressed, in a blue flannel shirt, with gauntlet gloves, goatskin chaps, and wearing a red-and-white spotted bandanna of silk knotted around his throat, which fluttered at the back of his neck in the wind of his galloping. The very sombrero which he wore was a white Stetson like Fantom's, with a string of rawhide woven around the brim to give it stiffening! Even the arrangement of his blanket roll behind the saddle was the same, with a yellow slicker strapped on top!

That was not all that the bewildered eyes of Fantom saw, for on the right, at the mouth of a small branching ravine, appeared Jonathan Quay beckoning.

Fantom did not pause to think. He swung into the ravine at the side of Quay and in a moment had lost sight of the main ravine around a sharp angle of the smaller gully.

There Quay drew rein, holding up his hand to check his young companion, and as they sat their horses, the drops ran down the face of Fantom; he heard the roar of the pursuit like the noise of turbulent waters going down the big draw, the rocks flying under hammering hoofbeats. Like a withdrawing wave the sound passed beyond their hearing,

roared dimly around distant corners, then was gone completely.

After this, he was able to look at the older man.

"What——" began Jim Fantom.

Quay smiled at him. It was apparent that he had been studying the face of Fantom ever since their horses were stopped.

"There'll be no more trouble," said Quay. "That young fellow who took your place knows how to ride a horse, and the horse he's on can travel. I think it could give the best of the sheriff's layout a close rub, in spite of its size, even if they were fresh for the race. Which they're not!"

Fantom could only stare.

"They won't catch him," said Quay. "Even if they should, all he has to do is to turn about and hold up his hands. They'll see that they have the wrong man."

"And do what to him?"

"Nothing. He was simply riding down the draw, when he saw horsemen riding furiously and thought that they might mean harm to him. He took no chances and rode hard for it. That's all there is to the thing, as it seems to me!"

"You don't know Bud Cross," said Fantom grimly.

"There you're wrong. I know Bud Cross intimately, thought I doubt if he's ever seen my face. I know him very well. He'll make no trouble for Chip."

"Chip Lander!" cried Fantom.

"He said that he knew you," answered Quay. "He was glad to do something for you on account of a little argument that you and he had a long time ago when you were boys. Is that right?"

"My head's spinning a mite," said the Phantom. "How did you manage to be here in the nick of time?"

"Does that seem like a miracle?" asked Quay gently. "I suppose it does, but if you were to take a bird's-eye view of Burnt Hill and the lay of the land around it, you wouldn't be surprised. If you rode straight east, over the easy, rolling hills, they were sure to run you down in short order. If they caught you there, I couldn't help you until you were in jail. But if you turned in this direction, as I guessed that you would, either you'd get safely off into the upper country, above timberline, or else they would begin to hammer you in this region. With their faster horses, they would be apt to run you into this draw. At least, that was the way I guessed the game. And it happened to turn out that way. There was about one chance in four that Chip Lander and his horse would be useful at this spot at about this time. And as you see, the fourth chance was the one that turned up! No miracle, Jim Fantom—no miracle at all!"

He smiled again, but it seemed to Fantom that the eyes of the older man were not smiling—they were blazing with a strange triumph and excitement.

"I'm pretty paralyzed by all of this," said Fantom. "Which I sure aim to thank you for my skin, which would be dryin' on the rocks, by this time, otherwise."

"No, no!" answered Quay. "They never would have caught you!"

"Not catch me?" cried Fantom. "They was so close that the tail of my hoss fanned their faces every time we switched around a corner!"

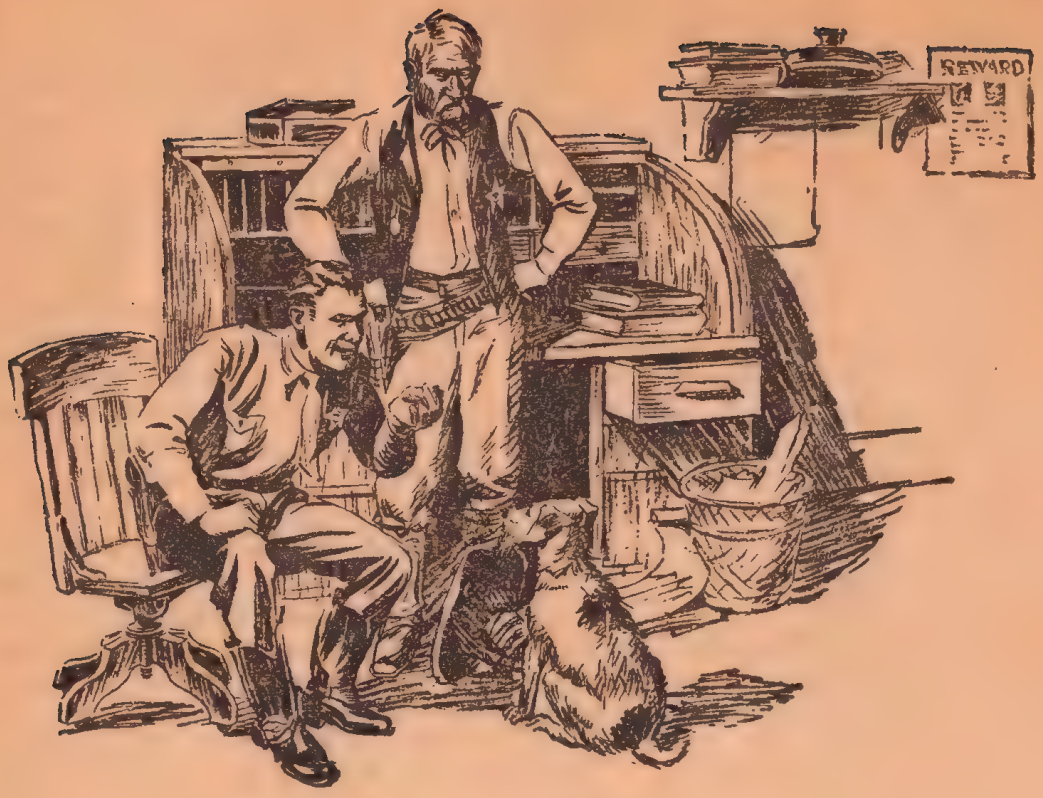
"Before they got you," said Quay, "they would have had to eat fifteen shots out of your Winchester; and there weren't enough stomachs in the lot to digest that much lead, I believe!"

"Most of that lead would of been plastered on the faces of the stones, I suppose," said Fantom.

Quay shook his head. He seemed to speak with an amused omniscience.

"No, no," said he. "You'll never miss your mark now, Jim, until you've come to your last day!"

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.



Dynamighty Dog!

By Ray Humphreys

Author of "Shorty Balls 'Em Out," etc.

NOW, Charley boy," said "Shorty" McKay, shaking a finger at the bewhiskered, shaggy dog that sat looking up at him with beady eyes, "go fetch papa's hat! Nice boy, go fetch hat off desk—bring it here, Charley boy—bring hat to papa!"

Sheriff Joe Cook, of Monte Vista, leaped from his chair with a whoop. He banged a heavy fist down on the flat-topped desk.

"'Charley boy! Papa'!" he yelled angrily. "Is it any wonder that I'm goin' plumb nuts right here in my own office?" He pointed an accusing finger at Shorty. "Yuh're a fine deputy, yuh are! Yuh an' yuhr blamed pooch pal—settin' thar doin' crazy tricks while I'm goin' nutty with worry! What about 'Conejos Sam,' eh? I say, what about Conejos Sam?"

Shorty reached for the cowboy hat that the dog had obediently brought to him, despite the sheriff's commotion.

"What about Conejos Sam?" echoed Shorty, patting the dog's head. "Waal, all I kin say is that we should oughter nab him in no time, boss—he kain't escape arrest ferever—but thar ain't no use gettin' all het up over him; we'll git him."

"We'll git him—bah!" exploded the agitated sheriff, glaring from Shorty to the dog and back again to Shorty. "I'll bet we'll git him—with yuh settin' thar foolin' with a fool dawg! Yuh're a

good pair o' nitwits, both o' yuh; an' Conejos Sam sendin' us threats to come in an' blow up the jail, an' us, an' half the town o' Monte Vista, ef we don't turn that crooked pal o' his—José Mendoza—loose. I say what are we gonna do, Shorty? I'm goin' loco worryin."

Shorty snapped his fingers at Charley, the dog, and Charley immediately turned an awkward but complete somersault.

"We've done all we kin do, boss," said Shorty. "We've looked high an' low fer Conejos Sam an' ain't found him, although it's a cinch he's hidin' out around these hills somewhars. I say we kin wait fer him to strike an' shoot him ef he tries it. Now, Charley, speak fer papa—up, sir, on yuhr hind laigs, Charley!"

"Charley an' papa!" roared Sheriff Cook, kicking a chair halfway across the office. "Fer the love o' gosh, Shorty, will yuh throw that fool pooch outta the winder so we kin talk business? Ef yuh don't, I swear I'll beat both o' yuh inter a pulp! Here we git another note from Conejos Sam this mawnin', repeatin' his brag to blow up the jail with dynamite ef we don't turn his buddy loose an' eet——"

"Yip, yip!" interrupted the dog, mistaking Shorty's movement to light a cigarette for an order to "speak."

"Dang that houn' dawg!" whooped the sheriff, and one hand dropped to his holster with the speed of a lightning flash. "I'll teach him a new trick—I'll blow his blinkin' head offen him!"

"Hey, boss," cried Shorty, as the sheriff's six-gun came out, "be yuhrself, boss! Charley didn't mean no harm by yippin' that time. He thought I wanted him to bark! Charley ain't a bad feller—jus' a pore dumb beast I figgered might be some help to us here in the office. A dang smart dawg, ef I do say so—he knows a pack o' tricks now, an' besides, the feller I got him from says he's part bloodhoun', an' ef he is we kin sure use him to good advantage after he's fully trained. Put that rod away, boss, please!"

The sheriff cooled. He jammed his gun back in the holster.

"Ain't worth wastin' a ca'tridge on," he grumbled, frowning. "Part bloodhoun'—poof! I ain't never seen no shaggy bloodhoun's in my life! He's a cur dawg, that's all—part setter, an' part terrier, an' part Airedale, an' part pug, an' part collie; mebbe one o' his great aunts was part bloodhoun', but him—bah!"

Shorty held Charley closer.

"Say, he ain't no bum!" declared Shorty, flushing. "I paid five good silver dollars fer him. He's young, that's all. He's gonna be a very smart dog, Charley is! Lookit the tricks I've taught him already—fetchin' things, an' settin' up, an' speakin', an' playin' daid—a lot o' things. I've taught him to put out fires, an' pull things from the crick, an' lead hosses, an'——"

A crafty expression settled on the sheriff's face.

"Oh, is that all so?" he asked, and there was a peculiar ring in his voice. "Waal, as I live! However, let's fergit the fool pooch fer a minnit, Shorty! I got me a idear! Yuh recollect them ol' shacks down past the depot, on the other side o' the creek, whar them Mex families lived once? Waal, I was jus' thinkin' that mebbe this Conejos Sam feller might be hidin' out in one o' them shacks. Supposin' yuh go down an' take a peek around them, eh?"

Shorty got to his feet at once. "Sure—come on, Charley!" he cried.

"Leave the pooch here," said the sheriff. "I may go out myself afore yuh come back, an' ef this dawg is so smart we might as waal learn him how to guard the office while we're away."

"Sure!" said Shorty, in surprised pleasure.

But Shorty's happiness over the sheriff's sudden kindly interest in

Charley, the dog, would have been short-lived, indeed, could he have heard Sheriff Cook's exclamation after the door had closed on his heels.

"All right, Charles," exclaimed the sheriff, rubbing his hands together, "we'll soon find out whether yuhr great aunt had any bloodhoun' blood in her or not! We'll soon learn whether yuh're all yuh're cracked up to be, as Shorty claims, or whether yuh're jus' a yaller cur, like I says yuh are! Here, Charles, come take a sniff at this letter, will yuh?"

The sheriff snatched a grimy envelope from his desk and held it toward Charley invitingly. It was the letter that Conejos Sam had left in the sheriff's mail box that morning, threatening anew to blow up the Monte Vista jail, and half of the town, if his imprisoned buddy, José Mendoza, was not freed at once. But the dog was suspicious. He remained on his haunches, near the door, and rolled mournful eyes at the sheriff. The sheriff tried to speak in a softer voice.

"Charles, ol' man, come here!" The sheriff snapped his gnarled fingers. "Come here, Charles, take a look at this —come, boy!"

But Charles merely yawned and licked his chops.

"Yuh worthless, lazy, good-fer-nuthin' fool!" exploded the sheriff. "I'll teach yuh to yawn at me when I gives an order!" The sheriff strode toward the dog. Charley remained motionless. The sheriff seized him with one capable hand and with the other poked the letter under his nose, holding it there a full minute. "Now, bloodhoun'," said the sheriff, opening the office door, "let's see yuh work yuhr stuff. Ef yuh are what yuh're supposed to be, git started on the trail, an' I'll foller yuh."

Charley seemed to understand. He wagged his tail, and he trotted out of the office with a backward glance at the sheriff. Sheriff Cook, jamming his black slouch hat down on his head, followed. Charley lingered in the jail yard a few moments, sniffing here and there, and then, with a series of short, energetic "yips," he was off, headed up Pecos Street on the run. The sheriff grunted in surprise.

"Got a trail, I guess!" he exclaimed, breaking into a run himself. "Mebbe I was too hasty about that Charley dawg, at that! Pecos Street leads right inter Piñon canyon, an' ef Conejos Sam did come inter town to deliver that note hisself, he might have come down Piñon! Gosh! ef that dawg was part bloodhoun', an' did lead me to that Sam feller, I'd have the laugh on Shorty, sure—usin' his pooch an' gittin' all the credit fer the capture o' Sam, while Shorty was off on the fool's errand I made up to git him outta the way!"

The sheriff went on, hurriedly, keeping a sharp eye on the dog. Charley hesitated now and then, looking back at the sheriff.

"Go on, Charles, go on!" encouraged the sheriff hopefully. "Don't mind me —I'll be along to back yuh up! Ef yuh help me nail that Conejos Sam I'll buy yuh a beefsteak every mawnin' fer a month, besides offerin' my apologies; an' ef yuh don't perduce no results—waal, I guess I kin accidentally lose yuh in the hills, an' I won't have to worry no more about Shorty wastin' his time on yuh."

The dog barked joyfully and ran on, nose close to earth. The sheriff's eyes narrowed and he, too, increased his speed.

"By gum, that pooch is trailin', sure as I'm Joe Cook!" exclaimed the sheriff. "I didn't think he had it in him! Wouldn't Shorty get a kick out o' this ef he was here to see? Huh! Waal, ef Conejos Sam is took, as I hopes, me an' Charley shares the honors! Ef this pooch is so blamed good at trackin', it ain't my fault ef Shorty neglected to

think o' this very stunt! Atta boy, Charley, go on!"

And Charley, frisky as a spring lamb, went on, too!

It was only after Charley had penetrated far into Piñon Canyon, however, that the sheriff began to get tired. He was on the verge of calling upon Charley to rest a minute when the dog suddenly let loose a fusillade of barks and dived into the brush off the road. The sheriff, yanking out his gun, followed. There was more excited barking, and the sheriff cocked his gun—and at that moment a huge jack rabbit leaped from cover and went sailing up over the crest of the hill, with Charley in hot but hopeless pursuit.

"Waal, I'll be switched!" exclaimed the sheriff, and sat down.

It was twenty minutes before Charley reappeared, and by that time the sheriff had cooled off some. He swore, however, as the dog came trotting back. There was a strange glitter in the sheriff's cold gray eyes.

"So we was only chasin' a jack rabbit, was we, purp?" said the sheriff softly, as Charley came up. "I might have remembered that them pesky jacks come down almost every night to graze on the nice green grass o' the jail lawn! Waal, don't offer no apologies, Charles! Yuh an' me, bein' so far out anyway, will go on over to Echo Lake, which ain't far, but whar thar is heavy timber an' lots o' cottontails. Yuh kin chase another rabbit inter the horizon, an' I'll go on home, content in the knowledge that yuh won't find yuhr way back to Monte in a month o' Sundays. Come on, Charles, we'll be movin'!"

It was not far to Echo Lake—not over two miles—and there was a fairly good trail. The sheriff panted as he trudged along, but the revenge he had in mind spurred him on. Echo Lake was in the center of a heavily timbered district, and the place was alive with game—a dog's paradise. In such a place, the sheriff reasoned, Charley would be hopelessly lost. He might take the trail from there to the Hayden Ranch, or to Grousemont Lodge, or to Conifer, Sprucedale, Lone Pine, or The Willows—with only one chance in seven that he would find the trail back to Monte Vista and the sheriff's office. Sheriff Cook chuckled at the thought. He was more prejudiced than ever against Charley, now—seeing that the pooch had led him on a wild chase after a jack rabbit. The sheriff chuckled as he figured out what he would say to Shorty when the latter asked for Charley.

"Why, when I opened the office door that crazy pooch jus' bolted out an' headed down the road toward Alamosa," the sheriff decided to explain. "I think he was chasin' that 10:15 freight train—mebbe some other tramp was ridin' the rods an' Charles knowed him as a ol' friend!"

Everything was quiet at Echo Lake. The sheriff, approaching the edge of the crystal water, sank down to rest under a pine tree. Almost immediately a scared bunny darted away, and in a second Charley was after him in full cry. The sheriff fanned himself with his hat.

"Good-by, Charley, an' good luck!" he mumbled wearily. "Yuh chase rabbits until yuh drap in yuhr tracks, Charley. As fer me, I'll catch my breath here a minnit—an' then go on back hum."

The sheriff closed his weary eyes and relaxed.

How long he slept he did not know. But he awoke with a start. At first he thought it was Charley, back from the chase, pawing at him. But when he opened his eyes he looked into the muzzle of a six-gun, instead of into the trusting face of Charley. The sheriff cringed, instinctively, but a harsh voice brought him to his senses in a hurry.

"Waal, sheriff, yuh come callin' early,

yuh an' yuhr dawg," said the swarthy individual behind the six-gun, "but I don't mind ef yuh did. Yuh might o' tooken me by surprise ef I hadn't been woked up by that pesky purp o' yuhr's yippin' around the cabin yonder. Now that yuh're here, I reckon yuh an' me are goin' to have a nice little chat, eh?"

"I come fer yuh, Conejos Sam," said the sheriff, but his voice lacked enthusiasm. He did not dare reach for his gun.

"Yeh?" sneered the outlaw. "Waal, yuh're here, anyway. An' that brings me to the point o' my conversation. What yuh goin' to do about my friend, José Mendoza, who yuh got locked up in yuhr jail, eh, sheriff? Surely yuh're gonna turn him loose, as I ask?"

"Not in the next thousand years!" angrily exclaimed the sheriff.

"Ha, yuh feel cocky still, do yuh, sheriff?" cried Conejos Sam, poking his gun closer to the sheriff's face. "How come yuh don't answer my letters, ignore my threats to blow yuh an' the jail up? Why yuh no release my friend, eh? Speak, please, before the six-gun she go boom an' the crows an' vultures begin to fly around here!"

The sheriff's face was white, but his voice was steady.

"Yuh ain't intimidatin' me, yuh crook!" he said firmly. "I got José Mendoza fer hoss stealin', an' I mean to keep him. I knowed yuh didn't have the nerve to try to blow up the jail. I don't fall fer bluffs worth a thin dime, Sam, yuh don't scare me inter nothin'. I come up here to have it out with yuh."

"So?" laughed Conejos Sam, and his gun came closer. "Yuh an' who else? That dawg mebbe? Ha, I laugh aloud! Yuh try bluff, sheriff, but I don't fall fer bluffs worth a thin dime, either! I say yuh no friend o' Conejos Sam. Yuh are his enemy—an' yuh know what Conejos Sam does with his enemies, eh? He puts one nice little hole through their thick haids, so that they may be out o' their sufferin's."

The sheriff said nothing. But he straightened a little bit as he saw Charley, the rabbit hound, approach and sit down near by.

"I teli yuh what I'll do," said Conejos Sam gruffly. "I keel yuh now. I put on yuhr clothes an' take all yuhr keys. I walk inter Monte Vista, an' right up to jail, an' open door myself fer my friend, José Mendoza, an' ef anybody say no, I pull the trigger. That is very simple, after all. I'm so glad yuh come up here, Mister Sheriff."

Sheriff Cook frowned. He was thinking fast.

"See here, Conejos," he said finally, "I ain't made up my mind one way or another yet. Supposin' yuh give me a hour, say, to kinda figger matters out? Mebbe I'll agree to let Mendoza go free."

The outlaw laughed at that. "Mebbe yuh think help come by then, eh?" he asked.

"No," said the sheriff, "I don't think so. I'll give yuh my word thar ain't a soul in town knows whar I am. I come here on my own hook. I'm playin' a lone game. What do yuh say to a hour?"

"I have killed five men," said Conejos Sam thoughtfully, as he considered Sheriff Cook's offer, "an' I no care ef I kill another. I am cold-blooded, Señor Sheriff. It is said that Mexicans are hot-blooded, yes, but I am only part Mexican. But it would be easier ef yuh turned Mendoza loose, after all, fer I might get hurt ef I walked in to do it myself. A man can never tell. But what proof have I that yuh would keep yuhr word?"

The sheriff looked his captor straight in the eyes.

"Ef I promise to free Mendoza, Sam," he said, "I will do it. You know I always keep my word."

"Waal—a hour then," agreed Sam, none too graciously. After that he disarmed the sheriff, and tied him securely

to the tree. He threw a rock at the dog, too. Then he spoke again to the sheriff.

"I go to prepare dinner fer one—mebbe two," he said, jerking his head back toward the shack of a cabin some distance away. "But I no do it thar. I make fire out here an' cook—whar I can keep eye on yuh. Nice venison, sheriff, killed out o' season—an' a pheasant, too. Yuh'll like both—ef yuh're alive to enjoy them."

Conejos Sam turned and made for the cabin.

"Here, Charles, ol' boy," said the sheriff hoarsely, after the outlaw was out of earshot; "come here, Charles—come here!"

But Charles was inclined to be shy; Sam's rock had just missed him, and he craved no more dodging just then.

The sheriff, working with his bound hands, managed to fish a scrap of paper from one pocket, and the stub of a lead pencil. It was nervous work, but he did it, and thanked his stars that he had both pencil and paper along. Then, using one lifted knee as a support, he laboriously scrawled his appeal for help.

"Shorty, fer heaven's sake, come. Conejos Sam has me——"

He got no further. At that moment Charley, the pooch, stuck a cold nose on the sheriff's right hand. At the same moment Conejos Sam appeared in the doorway of the cabin, pans and pots in hand. The sheriff slipped the piece of paper under Charley's tight-fitting leather collar and elbowed the dog aside roughly.

"Home, Charley—home!" ordered the sheriff frantically. Charley looked grieved. "Home, yuh nut—go home!" repeated the sheriff, but still the dog waited. "Home, dang hang yuh—go home, yuh cur—fer the love o' Mike, go home!" That was all the sheriff said. Conejos Sam was close at hand now. Still the dog lingered. Conejos apparently had no love for canines. He stooped and picked up another rock—and that was enough for Charley. With a frightened yelp, the dog whipped his tail between his legs and scurried away. The sheriff breathed a great sigh of relief.

"Gosh, ef he only kin find the way home!" he prayed. "I brung him here to lose him, thinkin' he couldn't ever find his way back to Monte, an' now ef he doesn't find his way back—I'm a goner!"

Conejos Sam collected some sticks and built a fire.

"Which yuh like—venison or pheasant?" he asked mockingly.

"Both," said the sheriff coldly; "but ef yuh ask me, Sam, I'd suggest that yuh leave me right alone with my thoughts here. I got ponderous matters to weigh in my mind. A hour is hardly long enough for me to figger this problem—an' I requests that I don't be disturbed. Ef I'm gonna give in, I got to do a lotta thinkin'."

Conejos Sam grunted as he built up his fire.

"Seein' I ain't kilt the pheasant fer dinner yet—nor the deer—I'll let yuh think," he growled. "This is a nice place. Plenty o' deer an' game. That's why I've been content to give yuh day after day to consider without carryin' out my dynamite threat. Yuh watch the fire, sheriff, while I goes huntin'. Yuh securely tied up?"

He examined the sheriff's bonds.

"Yeh, I guess yuh'll be here when I come back," he went on, satisfied. "I won't be gone long—guess we'll have pheasant to-day!"

Conejos Sam vanished into the timber. The sheriff tugged at his bindings, but they were too expertly done to give him much hope of loosening them. Then the sheriff thought of Charles and wondered if the dog was streaking for home. He should make Monte in half an hour's good going. Help might get back in half an hour's time, too, should

Shorty receive his note for assistance and hurry in response thereto.

"Gosh," groaned the sheriff, as moisture broke out anew on his forehead, "I fergot about the pesky rabbits! Ef that pooch meets one, it's good night me! Conejos will drill me when I refuse to promise to release his pal, an' I'll die with my boots on all because o' a worthless rabbit—a jack or a cottontail—one or the other!"

Conejos Sam was back again in less than twenty minutes. He had two fine pheasants. The sheriff winced at this open violation of the Colorado game laws, and Conejos Sam laughed at his captive's expression.

"Couldn't find no deer, sheriff," he said, "so we'll dine on birds. That is, mebbe yuh will. Lemme see now——" He glanced at the old-fashioned watch he dragged from his pocket. "I took this ticker off a stage driver I kilt near Montrose," he explained. "The fella wouldn't put up his hands when I asked him to. Waal, yuh got half a hour left."

"I'm thinkin'," said the sheriff, "don't bother me!"

Conejos Sam looked at him sharply. The sheriff seemed to be unusually cool for a man in his predicament. But the outlaw held his peace. He threw a few more sticks on the fire. Then he prepared the pheasants. When they were in the pot, he looked again at his watch.

"Eighteen minnits left—yuh!" he remarked sullenly. The sheriff did not answer, but the outlaw suddenly leaped to his feet with an oath. He jerked his gun from his holster, and his face went black.

"Say, yuh, whar's that danged dawg o' yuhrs?" he cried suspiciously, glancing around. "He ain't gone fer help, has he?"

The sheriff licked his lips. He shook his head.

"He—he chased off after a bunny!" he said softly.

"Chased off after a bunny?" repeated the outlaw slowly, as he toyed with his six-gun in indecision. "Funny I didn't see him go—funny I never thought o' that danged houn' gettin' away from here! I'd blow yuh clean to blazes, sheriff, right now, ef I thought——"

In spite of himself, the sheriff winced slightly.

"He—that dawg—he's just a tramp," said the sheriff huskily. "He's crazy about rabbits—he chased one off, an' then——"

Conejos Sam's black eyes were boring through the sheriff. "Yah?" he said with interest.

"Yes," said the sheriff, and there was conviction in his voice, because, after all, he figured that it was likely the fool dog had done just that thing. "I guess yuh don't have to worry about that pooch, Sam, he ain't got sense enough to——"

There was a delighted bark from the edge of the timber to Conejos Sam's left. The outlaw and the sheriff both turned their heads. There was the shaggy dog, Charley, sitting on his hind legs, looking at them. The sheriff's heart sank within him, but Conejos Sam laughed.

"Huh—I guess I was worried over nuthin', after all!"

"Yep!" said the sheriff, and his heart was in his shoes. The worthless Charles had not returned to Monte Vista, after all. It was not possible that he could have traveled all the way back to town, obtained help, and returned, in the space of some forty minutes. It would have been difficult for the dog to make the round trip even in an hour. Yet here he was. The answer was plain enough. The dog had been frisking around after rabbits, regardless of the sheriff's order to go home!

"Waal," said the outlaw, looking at his watch again, "yuh got jus' nine minnits left, sheriff—an' soup's about on. What do yuh say? Yuh want I should finish yuh off afore dinner, or are yuh

gonna be a nice boy an' gimme yuhr word that yuh'll release José Mendoza, my friend, from jail, an' give us both, say, twenty-four hours to make ourselves scarce, an' promise not to tell about me bein' here?"

Sheriff Cook looked reproachfully at the grinning Charley.

"Conejos Sam," said the sheriff sadly. "My word is good. That hour yuh gave me ain't up yet, but I might as wall tell yuh now that I ain't gonna make yuh no promise to release yuhr José Mendoza from the jail. Nope, he sticks, an' ef yuh gotta shoot me in order to enjoy yuhr meal, why——"

Conejos Sam swore as he drew his gun from the holster.

"Yuh got anything else to say afore I drill yuh?"

"Yes——"

"Snap it out then—quick!"

"All I kin say is—a cur dawg is a cur dawg," said the sheriff curtly, "any one else to the contrary notwithstanding! Yuh take a dawg that's crazy about rabbits——"

"Never mind that," said the outlaw, and he approached the sheriff quickly. "Sure yuh don't want to change yuhr mind about releasin' José? Quick now—yuhr las' chance!"

It may have been the sizzling meat that attracted Charley. At any rate, no sooner had Conejos Sam left the fire than the dog darted for it. He upset the pot of savory pheasant in a flash, and at the commotion Conejos Sam whirled. But Charley paid no heed to the tempting pheasant meat. Instead, he seized up a blazing fire-brand and headed away toward Conejos Sam's cabin like a streak of lightning. The outlaw, with an oath, fired once, missed, and then started in frenzied pursuit of the fleeing dog. Charley dropped the burning stick, as it grew too hot for him. Conejos Sam gained. But Charley picked the brand up again and went on, straight into the cabin. Conejos Sam, it seemed to the startled sheriff, appeared to be fairly flying. He reached the cabin door just as a tremendous explosion rocked the vicinity. There was a great cloud of smoke, streaked with flying débris. The sheriff, far away as he was, felt the sudden concussion.

"Dynamite!" he exclaimed. "Th' fool pooch set that burnin' brand down on Sam's dynamite—an' good-by Sam an' Charley!"

There was an ominous silence after the explosion.

"Waal," said the sheriff, tugging at his bonds in vain, "that's that! I'm sure enough rid o' Conejos Sam, five-time murderer, but I reckon I'll jus' set here an' starve to death now with a pot o' partly cooked pheasant right in front o' me to add to my pleasure in dyin'! Nobody will ever think to look fer me up here. I'll be joinin' Sam an' pore Charley across the Jordan in a few days. Pore Charley, I reckon he tried to do the best he could, after all!"

The sheriff closed his eyes and sighed.

"Three days at the most," he said, "an' with that tantalizin' pheasant meat right thar, outta my reach——"

There was a sudden wild shout, then another yell. The sheriff opened his eyes in surprise. There was Shorty, streaking it out from the timber, followed by Tom Egan, and Eddie Owens, and Doc Healey, and "Red" Feeney, and Bert Clark—all breathless, all excited.

"What—what happened, boss?" cried Shorty, dashing up, panting.

"Cut me loose fust," said the sheriff, and Shorty whipped out a knife. "Plenty happened—thanks to that fool pooch o' yuhr's, Shorty; but thar, I shouldn't oughter speak ill o' the daid! Yep, he's daid! An' so is Conejos Sam. They went up in smoke after the dawg took a blazin' stick inter the cabin. But how in heck did yuh all ever find me here, Shorty? I thought——"

"Yuh thank pore Charley fer that, sheriff," said Shorty in a mournful voice. "When I come back an' found yuh an' Charley gone, I got worried. Fortunately, ol' man Meehan, who lives on Pecos Street, came hobblin' up, all excited, to say he seen yuh chasin' a dawg toward Piñon Canyon. He thought yuh was crazy."

"I was!" admitted the sheriff ruefully. "I thought mebbe that dawg could git Conejos Sam's scent. He started out on a hot trail, but it turned out to be a jack-rabbit's trail, an' we come here—an' Conejos Sam got the drap on me——"

"Waal," went on Shorty, "when I heard that, I figgered mebbe yuh an' Charley was on the scent o' Conejos Sam. Ef so, I figgered yuh'd need help. I got the boys, an' we started up Piñon Canyon, an' sure enough we meets Charley comin' back down on a run. He's blamed glad to see me, an' comes runnin' to his papa—to me, that is—an' I sees the note under his collar——"

"Then Charley did save me, after all!" cried the sheriff.

"The note wasn't much good," said Shorty, "seein' yuh fergot to say whar yuh was. All it said was to come quick as Conejos Sam had yuh, but it didn't say whar to come. We didn't know whether yuh was in Lost Park, Gun Gulch, the Blue Mesa, Grousemont, Echo Lake, or whar; but Charley started back up Piñon again, so we followed, fast as we could. A rabbit jumped up, goin' Charley's way, an' we lost him in the chase. We was waitin' at the crossroads below, ponderin' whether to go to Lost Park or here, an' the vote was four to two fer Lost Park, when we hears that explosion, so we gallops up here."

Sheriff Cook took off his hat.

"Pore Charley!" sighed the sheriff. "He was about the swellest dawg a man could meet—mild, gentle, but quick an' full o' intelligence, as waal as bubblin' over with energy an' generosity! Ef he was alive now I'd buy him the finest porterhouse steak in Monte Vista."

A frightened "Yip" sounded close at hand.

"Why," cried Shorty, "lookit, boss, thar's Charley now! Come, Charley, ol' boy, come to papa. He's kinda frightened. Huh, I reckon he jumped right out the back winder o' that cabin after drappin' that firebrand. Kinda fortunate I had taught him to put out fires, an' tote things he found inter the house, an'——"

"Yep," said the sheriff. "What does a good porterhouse steak cost?"

BAN ON ELK-TOOTH ORNAMENTS

UNLESS we allow the already fast-diminishing herds of elk in this country to totally disappear, we must stop using the teeth of that animal for ornaments, the United States Biological Survey warns in a recent bulletin. The increasing popularity of this fashion has made such serious inroads into the elk herds that measures may be taken to severely penalize future elk-tooth hunters.

It is not the wearing of the teeth that the government objects to, but the wasteful methods employed in procuring the precious ornaments. While, it is pointed out, Indians have decorated themselves with elks' teeth for many years, the elk were killed primarily for food and skins, the teeth being merely a by-product. White men, however, have been overenthusiastic in their pursuit of the coveted ornaments, often killing elk just for the two decorative teeth, and wasting the remainder of the beast. Furthermore, much poaching on government preserves has taken place in all seasons by avid trophy hunters.

Big Timber

By Howard J. Perry

Author of "Dog Watch," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SOME READING MATTER.

HAVING reread the letter in his hand, "Big Timber" Overton then tossed it over to "Willapa Pete," slouched his massive frame deeper into the chair, and gazed despondently through the dingy window of the hotel lobby fronting on one of Mill City's narrow back streets, known to loggers of the Northwest as the "Skidroad."

Willapa squinted at the sheet of papaper, his sunken eyes narrowed, and his weathered face puckered. When he had finished laboriously reading the contents, he handed it back to his companion.

"Now, don't that beat the deuce!" he ejaculated. "Old Harrington gets a chance to buy that Cedar Gulch timber an' wants to give you fifty per cent for two thousand bucks." The little fellow scratched his almost bald head. "M'gosh, son." he said, "there's a fortune in that gulch, an' you got a opportunity to get half, if you only had the two grand."

Big Timber looked at him scornfully. "Yeah, if I had the money! That's a gosh-all-mighty big 'if.' 'If' we had three bucks between us, we could pay for our room for another week; but unless something happens darn quick we sleep out in the railroad yards tomorrow night." He settled farther into his chair, his face clouded with gloom. "It's just my luck. When it rains soup, I've only got a fork. Here we've been after that timber for years, an' now that we got a chance at it, we're as broke as a couple of drunk boomers. What we need at the present, Willapa, is a job, an' we need it dog-gone bad."

He reached for a near-by newspaper and turned to the "Help Wanted" column. Willapa studied him dolefully. "It sure is rotten luck," he agreed with

a sigh. "But that's loggin'. The trouble with us, we ought to be doin' somethin' else. Take minin', f'r instance. Big Timber, what we ought to do is go an' find a gold mine."

Big Timber glanced up from his paper with a withering look in his boyish eyes. Then he resumed reading.

"Hey, big boy!" the other flared. "Don't go givin' me none of those dirty looks. We'd be better off to-day if we'd gone huntin' gold. There's lots of it in this country. An old guy who got pretty stewed last night was sayin' this section up here's rotten with it. I'd sure like to take a whirl at it." There was a questioning note in his voice, and he paused expectantly.

Deliberately paying no attention to him, Big Timber was reading the want ads intently. Suddenly he sat up, his eyes fixed on the paper. Then he looked at Willapa with brightened face.

"Listen to this," he exclaimed. "Let me read this ad."

"Sure, go ahead," the other returned sourly. "But why bother readin' it? If they need two dishwashers, I'll go along."

Big Timber ignored the statement. He folded the paper and began reading:

"A real opportunity for the right kind of man who knows logging. No money needed. My proposition offers logging contract with all expenses and equipment furnished. Apply 206 Lumber Exchange Building."

He turned to his companion. "What do you make of that, Willapa? Looks like something, don't it?"

"Sounds phony, if you want my opinion."

"Maybe, but it's worth investigating."

"I suppose you think you're the 'right kind of man' that ad's talkin' about?" inquired the little fellow.

"Well, if it's loggin', I'll take a chance with any of them. I haven't ever done anything else." He rose. "C'mon, we're answering this."

"Why me?" asked Willapa. "You go. I want to find that old fellow who was tellin' me about the gold mine."

Big Timber scowled. He reached out one big hand and grasped the other by the collar. With the ease of lifting a child, he raised Willapa to his feet. "Listen, you runt," he growled. "I don't want to hear any more about gold mines. We're loggers, not prospectors. You start that racket an' we'll part company. even if we have been hitting it off together for the past ten years. You're going with me. I gotta hunch."

Willapa wriggled free and rubbed his shoulder ruefully. "Oh, all right, if you got your heart set on it, I'll go; but I sure would like to take a chance at finding that gol——" He stopped suddenly and ducked as his companion's hand shot forward.

Big Timber grinned broadly and started for the door. "Let's be getting along," he said. "We'll play my hunch. Maybe our luck will change."

Willapa followed him out and they turned toward the business section of the city.

Arriving at the second floor of the Lumber Exchange Building, they located the number and paused outside of the door marked in large letters:

STEPHEN J. CRUMPACKER
TIMBER INVESTMENTS.

Willapa gave the other a significant wink. But Big Timber merely smiled and opened the door.

The girl at the typewriter looked up inquiringly as they entered.

"We came to answer this ad," said Big Timber, jerking his head toward the newspaper he still held in his hand.

"Oh, yes," she smiled. "I'll ask Mr. Crumpacker if he wishes to see you." She rose and started for an inner office. "If you will be seated." She indicated a row of chairs against the opposite wall.

The two men settled themselves on the edges of their chairs, and the girl

passed into another room, closing the door after her.

As they waited, Big Timber's gaze came to rest on the frosted panel of the door through which she had gone. In one corner, a space about half an inch in diameter had been scratched clear. Suddenly he became aware of an eye peering through this. He shifted his glance to Willapa to ascertain if his companion had seen it, but the little fellow was interested in a picture on the wall. Big Timber looked back at the spot on the glass. The eye had disappeared. At that moment, the girl came out. She held the door open.

"Mr. Crumpacker will see you now," she announced.

They got to their feet and went in.

At a walnut desk, facing the door, sat a rotund, bald-headed man, neatly dressed. He fixed a pair of shrewd, boring eyes on them but in their depths, Big Timber thought he detected a lurking expression of haunting fear.

"You came in answer to my advertisement?" he asked in rather a strained voice.

"Yes, sir," said Big Timber. Willapa bobbed his head.

"Sit down and we'll discuss it," Crumpacker said, nodding toward two chairs. He hitched his own nearer the desk and rested his arms on the top, his eyes still upon his callers. He glanced toward their stagged trousers and logging boots. "I see you're loggers," he said, forcing a dry laugh. He glanced at Big Timber. "I suppose you're the one who's looking for this job?"

The big man assented. "Yep, I'm the one; but Willapa Pete here always trails along with me. We've been hitting the timber game together now for the past ten years."

Crumpacker smiled. "That's fine, but this proposition I have to offer calls for a man who can run a camp and get out logs."

"Well, you've got the right man in Big Timber then," Willapa interrupted. "There ain't a timber beast in the Northwest who can equal him."

At the mention of the name, Crumpacker sat up, his eyes widening with interest. "Big Timber, eh?" he said, turning to the larger man. "Big Timber Overton from the Gray's Harbor country?"

Big Timber colored. "That's right. But how did you know?"

Crumpacker rubbed his hands together. "I've been over in that section and I heard about the way you beat out the Great Western when they wanted to boost prices. I think I've fallen into some luck. I don't need to go into any further details regarding qualifications. I'll outline the terms, and I hope you will see your way clear to accept them."

Big Timber watched the growing animation of the other and waited.

Crumpacker reached into his desk and drew out a box of cigars. He extended it to Big Timber, who shook his head.

"Never got the habit," he said with a laugh.

Willapa, however, had stepped forward and reached for a smoke, and the little fellow's eyes beamed appreciatively as he lit it and settled back.

Crumpacker took one himself and, after lighting it, leaned forward in his chair.

"Well, boys, here's the project. I have a"—he cleared his throat—"a client who owns a section of timber at the head of Mad River. That's eighty miles north of here. My client lives in the East and the estate is tangled up in the courts, so that the only way he can have it logged is to sell it. Certain conditions in the title he holds make it impossible for him to operate the logging himself. Therefore, he wants to sell it at once."

Big Timber reached for his hat. "I guess you don't need to go on, Mr. Crumpacker," he said. "You've got the wrong man. I thought the ad said no money would be needed."

The other laughed smoothly. "Sit down, Overton," he said, "you didn't wait until I had finished."

Big Timber sat down again, but he retained his hat.

"I didn't expect you to use any money," Crumpacker continued. "What I want to say is that my client will deed the timber to you, and the title will be filed, but immediately you will deed it back. This one, however, will be kept in my safe and not filed unless you fail to do your part."

"What about operation costs and equipment?" asked Big Timber.

"I was coming to that," answered the other suavely. "There's a lot of equipment on the ground. I'll arrange with the bank for you to draw on them for any reasonable amount. All you will have to do is to present invoices for material and your pay roll every month. You get your own crew and start at once. For every thousand logs you deliver down the river at the Saginaw mill, we'll pay you a commission of fifteen per cent on the mill price. Now that's simple, isn't it?"

While he was talking, Big Timber was thinking. It sounded too good. He had never heard of such an offer, and he was endeavoring to discover the joker in it.

Apparently, Crumpacker guessed his thoughts, for he quickly added: "I know this sounds a little queer, but my client is a queer man. He wants that timber cut and delivered as soon as possible, and this is the only way he can do it."

Big Timber looked at Willapa, who was almost hidden in a cloud of smoke. The little fellow had been listening intently. Now he removed the cigar and grinned.

"Sounds like a Christmas present," he said. "We'd better have a look at this timber, son."

"That's just what I was going to suggest," said Crumpacker quickly. "Suppose you go up there and cruise it tomorrow and then come back and see me."

Big Timber rose. "All right, Mr. Crumpacker, we'll take a look at it. Then we'll let you know what we think about it." He started for the door, followed by Willapa.

Crumpacker got up from his seat. "There's just one more thing," he said. "This matter must be kept absolutely confidential. If any one gets wind of the arrangements, the whole affair is off."

"You don't need to be afraid of anything leaking out with us," assured Willapa. "This big boy here is as close-mouthed as a clam."

"That's good," the other replied. "To get to the Mad River section, you take the stage to Bonner's, and from there you'll have to hike up the river to look over the timber. I'll get the map for you."

They passed into the outer office, where Crumpacker went over the map with Big Timber. He also furnished them with money enough to make the trip. Then he escorted them to the door, and they left with another warning in their ears to say nothing about the proposition.

Neither said anything as they made their way back to the hotel. Big Timber kept turning the matter over in his mind. While it looked unusual and he expected to find some flaw, yet he could not help but think of the opportunity it afforded if Crumpacker were playing square with them.

It meant that he could get that two thousand dollars with which to go into the Cedar Gulch deal with Harrington. Yet there had been something odd about that eye at the hole in the glass, and Crumpacker's nervousness when they entered.

Finally, Willapa, who had been almost running to keep up with the big stride of his companion, spoke.

"Do you believe in Santa Claus, Big Timber?"

The big logger grinned. "It looks like there is one, don't it?"

"But it smells a little off," the other replied. "We're liable to get ourselves into a jack pot, if we ain't careful."

"We haven't a thing to lose," Big Timber considered. "An' it wouldn't be the first time we got into a jack pot. I guess we can handle ourselves getting out."

Willapa shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, all right, if you say go, we'll go. I'll not back out. You'll need me to watch after you, anyway."

CHAPTER II.

THE THREAT OF THE RIVER.

THE next morning the two were on board the stage that raced over the tortuous mountain highway, and at noon the driver stopped at a small store and informed them that it was their destination.

An old, whiskered individual met them as they entered the store to inquire the best way to get up the Mad River.

"You don't happen to be figurin' on thet there timber up there?" the old man asked, after he had pointed out the way for them.

"Maybe," said Big Timber. "Why?"

"Well, it ain't none o' my business," he replied, stroking his beard. "But if you value yore health, you'd better take my advice an' turn erround an' go back."

"What do you mean 'health'?" asked Big Timber. "Ain't it safe?"

"I ain't sayin' one way nor t'other, oney things just ain't ordinary 'bout thet Mad River country. There's been others up here lookin' after thet timber, an' one outfit started loggin', but they quit all-mighty suddenlike, an' their stuff is still there."

"Well, we're not saying what we're after," Big Timber said. "But we'll take a look at it, anyway."

"Suit yerselfs. Suit yerselfs," the old man muttered, as he turned abruptly and left them.

Both stared after him. Then Willapa swore.

"I'll be danged if this ain't gettin' spooky," he observed. "What you make of it, son?"

"I'll tell you better after we look at the timber. Let's get going."

They swung off on a rugged trail leading down the mountainside. Across the valley they could see the Mad River, where it came out of a wide, heavily timbered canyon. High walls of sheer rock hemmed this timber on both sides, and miles up the valley they saw where the two walls converged to a mass of granite bisected by a waterfall that tumbled from the snow fields above like a tiny silver ribbon.

"Gosh, what a stand of timber!" Willapa exclaimed. "That must be the stuff we're goin' to look at."

"According to the map and the directions Crumpacker gave me, those are the sticks," Big Timber replied. "An' it's sure a great-looking stand from here."

A half hour later they had crossed the valley and were following an old road along the river—a raging torrent, its banks gashed and strewn with mighty trees, victims of its merciless force as it raced down the mountains.

"They put the right handle on this river," declared Willapa, regarding the roaring waters. "A mad river is just what it looks like."

"A dog-gone good stream for logs," asserted Big Timber. "Won't be much driving necessary once you get them in that water."

"A heck of a time you'd have drivin' 'em," Willapa laughed. "Even you with your log-ridin' ability would be clawin' bark if you ever started down that on a four-foot spruce."

"Well, here's hoping I won't have to, or any one else, for that matter," declared the other. "It won't take any driving. All we'd have to do is dump the logs an' the river will take care of them."

He had been studying the timber along the way and a feeling of exaltation swept over him as he observed the size and quality of the trees.

"She's dog-gone nearly all clear stuff, Willapa. I'll bet it'll run better than sixty per cent."

Presently they came to a clearing where several logging shacks had been built. An inspection proved that they were in good condition, and Big Timber was elated to find considerable equipment and supplies. Taking the trail up the river, they came upon two donkey engines, their stacks capped to keep out the rain, and the machinery protected from the weather by a heavy coating of black paint.

Big Timber beamed. "Unless there's something crooked in this deal, it ain't going to be hard to begin loggin'," he declared. "Whoever started this knew their business."

Willapa merely nodded. Throughout the trip his sharp eyes had been busy. At each creek and wash, he had stopped and studied the rocks and sand deposits, occasionally picking up a small piece of quartz.

So engrossed was Overton in the timber, that he failed to notice his companion. Now he suddenly paused as the little fellow stopped to kick loose a chunk of gravel in a newly formed wash. He stepped threateningly toward him.

"Say, you runt," he yelled, "have you still got that crazy gold idea in your head?"

Willapa looked up guiltily.

Big Timber scowled down at him. "Didn't I say I'd part company with you if you started that again?"

"Gosh, I ain't said a word about gold," Willapa retorted, regarding him with a hurt expression in his little eyes. "I was just amusin' myself."

"Well, you amuse yourself looking at this timber we're going to log. An' we must get goin'. We've got a lot of hiking to do yet, and we don't know much about this country. We want to get up as far as we can an' see how the stuff looks."

He strode on, Willapa following close on his heels. At a point in the trail where it offered an unobstructed view of the river, Big Timber stopped short in his tracks, his eyes fixed on an object poised on a rock midway in the stream. He blinked hard as though uncertain of his vision, but the graceful form of a girl persisted. She had high boots and was whipping the stream with a fishing line, her wind-blown hair flying about her red cheeks.

He heard his companion whistle softly.

"M' gosh!" the little fellow gasped. "What in thunder do you suppose she's doin' in this forsaken country?"

Both men watched her for several minutes as she cast her line out across the dancing water, oblivious of their presence. Directly below her, the water eddied and whirled in a threatening series of deep whirlpools.

"Wonder if she lives around here?" asked Big Timber.

"How should I know?" replied the other. "'Member what that old guy said at the store. Maybe she's one of these sireens you read about. Better look out, big boy."

The look Big Timber gave him was weighted with scorn. "I'd like to talk to her," he observed. "Maybe she could give us a bearing on the best way up the river."

"Well, go ahead. She won't bite."

"With the noise this water's making, she'd never hear me."

"You might try," suggested Willapa. "You've got a voice like a locomotive."

Big Timber scrambled down to the

edge of the water. The girl was turned halfway from them. He waited a moment, thinking she might make a move in their direction. then he called:

"I beg your pardon, ma'am!"

The words were swallowed up in the roar of the river, but from above him came a derisive snort.

"Yell, son!" Willapa shouted loudly. "This ain't no church."

His shrill voice apparently carried across the water, for the girl, with a frightened gesture, started and whirled. The movement threw her off balance and one foot slipped from the rock. She made a futile effort to regain her equilibrium, and the two men were horrified to see her pitch into the surging depths beneath her.

Between the second that she struck the water and disappeared, Big Timber realized her danger. She had gone in below the rock where the back eddy met the full force of the river. It would be almost impossible for any human being weighted with clothes to fight that twisting torrent. She would be carried swiftly downstream. Big Timber darted a look below and saw a log jam not forty feet distant. The sibilant swish of the sucking whirlpool came to him from that point.

Then the girl's head appeared. She made a grim effort to battle the current and flung an appealing look toward the two as she was carried nearer the jam.

Immediately, Big Timber acted. His mackinaw dropped from his shoulders while he was in mid-air. He heard Willapa cry out:

"Lookout, Big Timber! You'll be drowned, too."

But he splashed into the water and threw all his power into his limbs. The speedy flow aided him, but he noted that the girl was losing her strength as she fought against the river's force. She was now only twenty feet from the jam. Big Timber drove ahead. He gained on her, and, seeing him coming, she smiled bravely and lashed out with renewed strength.

One of the first whirlpools stayed her. At the same time, Big Timber turned toward midstream to catch the full rush of the river. He swept by her, but with masterful stroking, turned and fought his way back, just as she was again caught by the mad water and hurled toward the jam.

Reaching her side, he threw one arm under hers and began what he knew was to be the real battle. It was hopeless to try and make the shore at that point. A vertical bank of clay flanked the river there. His only chance was to work back upstream. Even had he been unburdened he doubted his ability to beat the terrific pull. Now, with only one available arm, it looked as though the odds were against him.

He was relieved, however, to feel the girl relax. She had not lost her head. He bent his lips to her ear.

"We've got to make it!" he cried. "Help all you can."

She nodded and began to stroke. Big Timber looked toward the bank. They were making no progress. He saw Willapa dragging a long sappling to the water, but they would have to fight for at least ten feet before they could reach a point where Big Timber could grasp it. His clothes clung to him and his water-soaked boots felt like chunks of lead.

Setting his teeth, he mustered all his reserve of energy. After a minute of working, he again sent a glance toward shore. They had gained a few feet. He breathed easier.

"We're making it!" he whispered encouragingly in her ear.

Her mouth tightened in a firm line. She was concentrating on every movement of her arms. Inch by inch they battled against the river's tugging power. Could they hold out? That question burned in Big Timber's brain. But that log jam and those whirlpools

were the only alternative. They must win.

Willapa had poked the sapling out into the stream and was clinging to one end as the other swung toward them. He dug in his heels and threw his weight against the stick to keep it from being carried against the shore.

Now they were only five feet from it, yet that seemed an immeasurable distance. Gathering the last ounce of his waning strength, Big Timber put it into his arms and legs. Apparently, the girl sensed the crisis. He felt her forge ahead. For the next moment they struggled frenzily.

Big Timber threw out his hand to clutch the end of the sapling. He missed. That effort cost them a foot. They strove to make it up. He decided to attempt it again. Releasing his hold about the girl's waist, he grasped one of her arms. With a desperate lunge forward that almost carried him out of the water, he shot his other arm out. His fingers closed over the end of the stick. Like a vise, he clamped them, while a triumphant shout came from Willapa as he started to drag them toward the edge.

Big Timber looked at the girl. A thankful smile lit her eyes. His feet struck something hard, then his knees. Releasing his grip on the pole, he struggled to his feet. And, lifting the girl in his arms, he stumbled up the bank and dropped exhausted at Willapa's feet.

CHAPTER III.

SHOTS FROM THE SHADOWS.

THE girl was the first to speak. Sitting up, she brushed the wet hair from her face, laughter welling in her eyes.

"Wasn't it silly of me to slip off that rock?" she said. "It nearly cost us both our lives. You took an awful chance, and I want you to know I appreciate it."

"That's all right," answered Big Timber, still breathing hard from his exertion. "I guess it was a lot our fault for coming up on you all of a sudden."

"Gosh," declared Willapa, "if there's any blame in this, I ought to take it! I was the one who yelled."

"Well, it's all over, and I still believe you are both entitled to a Carnegie medal," she returned. "I will admit that I was startled. One doesn't see many strangers up here."

Big Timber thought he caught a question in her words. At the same time, he felt a growing sense of curiosity about her. What was she doing in this rugged part of the country? She was not the type of girl usually found in such sections. Somehow, he felt a vague feeling of inferiority in her presence, a sensation he had never before experienced when with girls whom he had met in the timberlands.

"I guess we ought to introduce ourselves," he said with a grin. "My name's Big Timber Overton, an' this here is Willapa Pete, my sidekicker for the past ten years."

She smiled up at the little fellow who colored deeply under his tan. He bobbed his head. "Maybe you'd better say 'caretaker,' Big Timber," he said. "You know, Miss—Miss—er—— Well, anyway, you'd think he needed one sometimes."

She laughed. "My name's Myra Carlin. I live here with my father who's a—a trapper."

"Ought to be a good place to get furs," observed Big Timber, "but I always thought they weren't much good this far south."

"Oh, dad only goes after muskrats and mink," she explained quickly. "He's also doing it for his health. He hasn't been very well."

Big Timber studied her closely as she got to her feet. He wondered if he weren't getting obsessed with the idea that every one was acting queerly. First it was Crumpacker, then the old fellow

at the store, and now this girl. But the next moment he was aware that she was looking at him questioningly.

"If you would care to, I would like to have you come up to the cabin and have some lunch and perhaps dry out," she offered, and added with a laugh: "At least, I can give you that much of a reward. Dad is away for the day."

Big Timber saw Willapa's eye light appreciatively.

"I—I guess we could do that, if you feel like taking a chance on a couple of timber beasts, and I think I can speak for Willapa if that hungry expression on his face counts for anything," he said.

Myra regarded him fixedly. "Timber beasts?" she asked. "Then you are up here cruising this timber?" There was a stringent note of anxiety in her voice.

"That's right," replied Big Timber. "We're thinking about logging it, if it looks good enough. But how did you guess it?"

She flushed deeply in confusion. "I—I suppose by your clothes."

Big Timber laughed. "Yes, I'll admit we're dressed like timber beasts."

"But it isn't very good timber, is it?" she inquired seriously.

"Why, we thought it looked first rate!" he answered, surprised. "Don't you think so?"

"Oh, I don't know much about it, but I've heard a lot of talk concerning this stand. They say it isn't worth logging and would be too hard to get out."

She started away. Then, with a resolute shrug, she seemed to shake off the cloak of gravity that had enveloped her. Brightening, she said, "We'd better move along pretty fast. It's more than a mile to the cabin."

She led them to a trail that turned away from the river toward a heavily wooded canyon grooved in the mountain. After a short time of brisk walking along a sparkling creek, they came suddenly upon a shake cabin almost hidden in a group of trees. The midsummer forest stillness hung over the spot and Big Timber noted the atmosphere of neatness about the place.

As though aware of his thoughts, Myra smiled appreciatively. "My kingdom in the wilds." she laughed. "No queen has more authority over her realm than I have here, and I love it. Even the noisy old woodpecker who wakes me at dawn with his rapid tattoo on that old dead stump."

She walked ahead and opened the door into a large room with a cobblestone fireplace at one end, and furnished with an assortment of handmade furniture.

"And now, if you'll excuse me for a moment, I'll get into some dry clothes," she said, turning to an inner room. "I'm sorry that I can't furnish you with some, but I guess you don't mind being wet."

Big Timber and Willapa both laughed. "Gosh, we'd catch cold if we didn't get a soaking once in a while," declared the latter.

She disappeared into the other room and a few minutes later returned clad in a dry suit of khaki. Quickly she had a fire roaring in the small stove that sat in an alcove off the large room, and soon the aroma of frying bacon drifted tantalizingly to their nostrils.

Big Timber followed her movements with deep curiosity. Willapa, who had been fingering a magazine, finally looked up and studied his companion amusingly. Waiting until the girl had gone out a rear door, he leaned forward.

"Look out, big boy," he whispered. "'Member what I said about sireens. I ain't figurin' on losin' a pal."

Big Timber flung him a numbing scowl as the girl came into the room again. He had noted one thing in her attitude that puzzled him. Throughout the preparation of the meal, she repeatedly glanced through the window, and he was certain he saw apprehension in her eyes when she did so. Now she

beckoned them to come to the table, which she had set across the room.

During the meal, which Willapa devoured in famished silence, Big Timber and Myra talked, the girl always switching the conversation to Big Timber's plan of logging the valley.

"Don't you think you could find a better bargain in timber some other place?" she asked. "Surely, there must be cheaper and better stands?"

"But why not this?" he countered, his brow troubled. "I've got a chance to make some real money here, an' I sure need funds."

She did not reply for a moment. but her gaze swept past him to the window. When her eyes returned to him, he saw them full of concern.

"Are you planning on continuing up the river to-day?" she asked.

He nodded. "We're going as far as we can to determine the stand up above. We've got to get back to-night."

"It's going to be rough traveling," she said. "There's no trail, and the underbrush is heavy. The best way is to follow the river closely."

"We're accustomed to that kind of country," Big Timber assured her. He got to his feet. "An' I guess we'd better be going now or we won't make it back before dark."

She followed them out, accepting their profuse thanks with smiling grace. "I'll go with you to the river and see that you get started on the right course," she said lightly.

Again Big Timber looked at her closely. Surely she did not mean to infer that they were incapable of finding their way. She met his gaze momentarily, and he was positive he saw fear in her eyes. Then she smiled and turned away.

"If you follow the bank all the way, you'll find it easiest," she said, when they reached the river. Then she added: "But you could save time by not going on. I've seen most of the timber up above and it's just like that you've come through."

"Well, maybe we won't go very far," Big Timber replied.

"I hope not." she answered cryptically, holding out her brown hand. "And I want to thank you for what you did. Perhaps I can return the favor."

Big Timber took her hand. "You never can tell about things," he replied.

She shook hands with Wallapa next, and then stood and watched them as they plunged through the underbrush.

The two men pushed on for several minutes without a word.

"Something queer about her," Big Timber finally observed. "What you make of it, Willapa?"

"Gosh-all-mighty! I don't know nothin' 'bout women, but I'll bet my extra pair of socks she was stringin' us for some reason. That didn't look like a place where a trapper lives, an' she seemed all-fired anxious to tell us the timber wasn't any good."

Big Timber did not answer. He was deep in thought. After fifteen minutes of struggling over deadfall, he paused to get his breath.

"Say, Willapa," he said. "It just came to me that if her dad was a trapper, there'd be a trail along the river. I never saw one of these streams that didn't have some kind of a trail leading up it."

Willapa assented. He was looking at the timber around them. "An' feast your eyes on these big sticks, son," he pointed out. "This stuff is even better than that we saw this mornin'. She was sure givin' us a bum steer."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'm going to do," Big Timber asserted. "I'm going to cut off up the slope an' see if she was telling the truth about there being no trail."

"Good idea," the other agreed.

They turned away from the river and started the climb. After a half mile, Big Timber, who was leading, stopped

short. He had come out on a well-defined path. When Willapa joined him and noted the discovery, they looked at each other wonderingly.

Big Timber was about to speak when the dirt was thrown up at his feet. This was followed by the report of a gun above them. They both whirled. At the same instant, the bark flew from a tree not two feet from their faces, and a second crack came from somewhere on the slope higher up.

Impelled by the same thought, both men leaped off the trail and ducked into a clump of salal brush. There they paused.

"Now what you make of that?" asked Willapa.

"Your guess is as good as mine. This is getting kind of spooky. I'm just trying to figure out if there is any connection between that girl an' this shooting."

"Looks that way. She sure didn't want us to go up the trail, so maybe she knew what would happen if we did. I'm all for callin' this deal off, so far as the timber is concerned."

Big Timber's jaws bulged. "Not on your life," he snapped. "I'm going to see this through. I'll log this valley now, even if it's only to find out what's behind this."

"Well, then, what'll we do?" demanded Willapa. "Go back up an' see if that pop-gun artist can shoot better the third time?"

"No, we'll cut back an' hit the trail lower down. I've seen enough to convince me this is good timber an' worth loggin'. I'm going to town an' accept Crumpacker's offer."

Willapa scratched his head and eyed the other for a moment. Then his face twitched good-naturedly. "Lead on, general, lead on!" he said with affected drama.

Starting away through the brush and keeping well hidden for a quarter of a mile, Big Timber finally worked back to the trail. They moved along cautiously, alert to every sound. He was beginning to feel that they had left whatever danger there was behind, when in rounding a sharp curve, they came face to face with a stranger.

He was past middle age, with iron-gray hair showing at the temples, and there was something about his face that made Big Timber think of those business-worn men he had occasionally seen in city offices. A holster and the butt of a revolver showed at his right hip. He stood as though he had been waiting for their approach.

"Hello, boys!" He forced friendliness into his greeting.

"Howdy!" said Willapa. Big Timber merely inclined his head.

"Out for a little pleasure trip?" was the next question.

"Not exactly pleasure," Big Timber stated. "We thought it might be, but some one just tried to take us for a target. It was lucky for us his aim was rather off."

"H'm, you must have been looking over the timber," the other said.

"That's just what we were doing, but does every one get shot at up here when they look over the timber?"

The stranger smiled with his mouth, but his eyes remained cold. "Yep, you're correct! There's an old fellow living back in the woods—sort of a hermit. Some say he's crazy. Anyway, he's got the idea he owns this timber, and has threatened to shoot any one who attempts to take it off. I guess that was him. I can't imagine any one wanting this stuff. It looks pretty good, but it's over age and wouldn't be profitable to log. But he's been known to take a shot at others who have come up here."

Big Timber watched the man's bland features as he was relating this. He felt his temper rising, and struggled to keep it from showing in his face. If that was poor timber he had seen for the past four hours, then his years in the logging camps had taught him nothing.

Yet the girl and now this stranger had both tried to tell him it was not worth logging. He felt certain that something was decidedly queer about the whole thing. At the same time, the mounting anger in him made him more than ever determined to log it. He glanced again at the other's gun.

The newcomer saw the look. He smiled as though he were prepared with an explanation for that, too. "My name's Carlin." he said. "I'm trapping up here. That's how I come to know this. I've only seen the old fellow at a distance. He's more like a wild animal than a man."

"You're Myra's father," concluded Big Timber.

The older man regarded him quickly. "Do you know her?"

"Just met her to-day," said Big Timber evenly. "She had a little accident—fell into the river. We pulled her out." He turned to make his way on down the trail.

"Just a minute," Carlin called excitedly. "She wasn't hurt, was she?"

The big man shook his head.

Willapa grinned. "Not your daughter," he exclaimed. "She'll take care of herself anywhere, an' I might add for the benefit of my modest partner, that it wa'n't 'we' that pulled her out." He jerked his thumb toward Big Timber. "He did it, an' nearly got drowned in the bargain."

Carlin's poise had left him. "Why—why, that was mighty fine of you!" he stammered, his voice at an emotional pitch. "If I can be of any service to you—if you should be looking for some good timber, perhaps I could tell you where you could get it."

"Thanks." Big Timber replied coldly. "I've seen about the best stand in this country to-day, and I'm going to log it." He swung around and strode down the trail, Willapa hurrying in his wake.

Throughout the remainder of the trip back down the river, Big Timber was busy with his thoughts. Willapa made several efforts to strike up a conversation, but, after receiving only a few grunts from his companion, he gave up. Even when the little fellow paused to explore the wash again, Big Timber ignored him.

It was not until they were in the stage and nearly back in town that he essayed to let the other know what plans were forming in his mind.

Willapa's head was rolling sleepily on his shoulders, and Big Timber poked him in the ribs. "Listen, you runt," he growled. "You're traveling down to the harbor to-morrow morning."

Willapa sat up with a start. "Who, me? What do you mean travelin'?"

"You're going down an' bring back as many of the Roaring River boys as you can find. Tell them I want them, an' there's a dollar a day more for every man, besides the chances for a good fight. They'll come."

"Oh, I ain't afraid they'll not come if I tell 'em you said there might be a battle," assured Willapa. "That gang would rather fight for you than eat." He studied his partner quizzically. "But are you sure you want the Crumpacker propositions, son?"

"You're darn tootin' I do," Big Timber snapped. "It's the one chance I have of getting that two thousand bucks, which means an outfit of my own. I've got a hunch there's more behind that shooting than a crazy old guy. But whoever it is, they're going to know that they've tried to stop something."

CHAPTER IV.

BIG TIMBER STANDS PAT.

THE next morning Big Timber called on Crumpacker alone. As he walked into the office, the man scrutinized his face intently.

"Well, how was the trip, Overton?" he asked. "How did you find the timber?"

"First rate," replied Big Timber. "Never saw a better stand an' one easier to handle. I'm ready to accept your deal." He saw the other's eyes light.

"Meet any one up there?" Crumpacker asked quickly.

"No, pretty far away from civilization. Guess there ain't any one in that section."

Relieved, Crumpacker settled back in his chair. "Well, we might as well get the papers signed. I've got them all made out. I suppose you're ready to get started at once?"

"To-morrow, if I can."

After they had prepared the deeds, Crumpacker took Big Timber to the bank. They entered by a rear door and the latter was introduced to the president. Arrangements were quickly made for Big Timber to draw on an account, Crumpacker providing for a cash deposit for him to check against for incidental expenditures.

The first thing Big Timber did when he returned to the hotel was to see that Willapa was put on the train, and he spent the remainder of the day and most of the evening buying supplies and equipment and getting them loaded on trucks. The following morning he started out with the caravan for Mad River, accompanied by a crew of loggers he had picked up the day before to help get the camp in shape.

At the end of the third day, they had everything in readiness and were prepared to take the first donkey engine up the skidroad to a point on the river which Big Timber had picked out as a suitable place to boom his logs.

That night a wild shout from below brought them all out of their bunk houses to greet Willapa and ten of the Roaring River loggers. For several minutes the camp was in an uproar, as the men greeted Big Timber.

"Half that bunch quit their jobs when I told them what you wanted," boasted Willapa, when the noise had subsided.

"Yep," assented "Long Tom" Sander, a giant hook tender. "Willapa, here, said there might be a fight, an' we sure didn't want to miss it."

Big Timber felt a surge of pride as he looked at the loyal, rugged group, many of whom had logged with him for years. "Well, boys," he said. "I don't want to promise too much, but I can tell you that if we put this deal over, there's a bigger one waiting for us that'll give you all jobs for a long time. Now let's turn in, because we've got a heavy day to-morrow."

The next morning when the bull cook beat his tattoo on the triangle, they were all out of their bunks before he had got under full swing. They needed no second call for breakfast, and a half hour later the timbered hills echoed with their shouts, as they started for the woods.

For the succeeding week, the forest reverberated with the thunder of falling trees and the chatter of the donkey engine as it puffed and snorted under the strain of yanking the big sticks down the skid ways to the river.

So occupied was Big Timber that he forgot the incident of the shooting on the trail, and only when he paused to study the angry waters of the torrent did he think of Myra Carlin. He wondered why she had not put in an appearance somewhere, but when he made inquiries of the fallers who were working near the Carlin cabin, they reported they had seen no one.

Then, one afternoon, some one fired on the woods boss as he was exploring a stand of timber over on the slope above the river. The bullet tore through the fleshy part of his leg, and Long Tom Sander and one of the buckers carried him into camp.

Big Timber was in the commissary with Willapa, who had chosen the position of timekeeper. The little fellow gave first-aid treatment while Big Timber looked on, his brows knit and his mouth drawn firm. He might have

known things had been going too easily. While this was of little consequence in itself, somehow he felt a foreboding premonition that it was only a sample of what he could expect, if there were some one who opposed his logging the Mad River valley.

"D'you think it could be the crazy nut Carlin spoke about?" Willapa asked, as he rose to his feet, a bottle of iodine in one hand and a roll of bandages in the other.

"Maybe," muttered Big Timber, "and again, maybe not. I'd feel better if I was sure of the truth of what's behind all this."

"Waal," drawled Long Tom, "whoever it be, they'll soon larn they can't scare us out with one shot, eh, boss?"

"But I hate like the deuce to have any one of the boys bumped off on account of me."

"Shucks, you forget that stuff," declared Long Tom. "Us Roarin' River timber beasts wouldn't be content if we didn't have some little excitement. When that gang hears 'bout this, you couldn't get 'em to quit."

And the big hook tender's prediction proved correct. When the men came in from work that night and learned of the shooting, their enthusiasm swelled as they speculated on the possibilities of a fight.

But Big Timber failed to catch their spirit. He cautioned the men to be on the lookout the next day, and immediately to report to him if they saw any one who did not belong to the camp.

"It just don't look good to me," he observed to Willapa early the following day. "There's something going on I can't understand."

"Maybe it's just our luck," Willapa suggested. "I still believe we ought to have gone gold minin'."

The big man darted him a warning look, and Willapa involuntarily edged away. "Now, don't go gettin' peevish, big boy," he said reproachfully. "There ain't nothin' wrong about gold minin'. I was just goin' to elucidate on some important information, but, of course, if you feel that way about it——" He shrugged disdainfully.

"Right now I feel very much that way," growled the other. "We are loggin', and not gold digging, and I've warned you about referring to that crazy notion." He started out of the commissary and was making for the woods, when he observed a stranger approaching on horseback. With a sweeping, puzzled glance, he took in the other's leather puttees, pressed riding clothes, and stiff Stetson.

"I'm looking for the owner of this outfit," the newcomer said, reining up before Big Timber. "A fellow by the name of Overton, I believe."

"I'm that man," replied Big Timber. "What can I do for you?"

The stranger surveyed him appraisingly. "My name's Craddock," he announced. "James Craddock. According to the records at Mill City, you've purchased this timber."

The big man nodded. "Yes, I guess you got it right."

Craddock leaned forward and pulled at his black mustache. "I'm kind of interested in this stand, too," he said. "I'd like to make you a proposition."

Big Timber studied him closely.

"I take it, you'd be willing to sell if you got a fair profit," the newcomer went on. "And that's what I came up here to offer you."

"Sorry," said Big Timber. "But I'm not interested in selling. I'm loggin' this." He smiled inwardly. This fellow was not in with Crumpacker or he would have known how impossible it would be to even discuss a deal.

"What's the matter?" the other demanded, becoming irritated. "Wouldn't you sell if you knew you could make more than you could logging this stuff?"

Big Timber grinned good-humoredly. If Craddock was looking for informa-

tion, he had come to the wrong place. "Does sound queer, doesn't it?" he laughed. "But that's all there is to it. I'm not sellin', I'm loggin'."

Craddock's face flushed. "What's the matter? Are you crazy?" he cried. "I'll pay you more than you can make if you sell every stick at the highest price."

"Sorry," said Big Timber again. "I don't think I'm crazy, and I do know that this stuff isn't on the market."

For a few seconds Craddock did not reply. He merely stared at the other, who saw the anger mounting to the surface in his eyes. When he spoke, his voice was hard and his jaw went out menacingly. "Maybe you don't think you're crazy now, but you will. Suppose I told you that you'll find you've bit off more than you can chew when you started to log this?"

Big Timber's muscles tensed. "I'd say *you* were crazy," he replied evenly, but there was the defiance of cold steel in his voice. For a moment, he thought Craddock would leap at him from his saddle, but instead, he pulled up on the reins.

"Remember, Overton," he warned, "I gave you your chance." With that he drove his spurs into the flanks of his horse and loped off up the river.

Big Timber scratched his head contemplatively as he watched him disappear. Then he started for the woods. This was a new twist in affairs, and he had an inexplicable notion that Craddock was connected in some way with that shooting. There was no doubt now that somebody did not want the timber taken off, and that it would not be cut without a struggle.

He wondered if Crumpacker, behind his oily manner, knew more about this than he had told him. He thought of the eye at the glass door he had seen the first day he was in that man's office and his extreme secrecy in making the deal.

He wished he had some one he could go to for a clew that would help him get an idea as to just what the opposition was up to, and of what it consisted. He thought of Myra Carlin. Was she aware of the status of things? She had certainly acted as if she knew more than she pretended that day he had met her.

Presently, Big Timber stopped. He turned toward the little canyon where the Carlin cabin was located. He would go and see her. Perhaps he could pick up some information. It was worth trying, and, anyway, he would like to see her again. There was a pleasant thought in this decision.

He struck off and in a few minutes came in sight of the Carlin home. But just as he emerged from the timber and prepared to strike up to the door, he saw a horse, which he recognized as the one Craddock had ridden, tied outside.

Instantly he drew back into the shadows. So this was where Craddock had gone when he left the camp so hurriedly! He smiled grimly. Craddock had some business with Carlin, and it did not need a prophet to explain what that business was. He recalled the appearance of Carlin the day he and Willapa had been shot at. The reason for the gun at the old man's hip seemed quite apparent now.

Cautiously, Big Timber slipped along behind the tree trunks toward the rear of the cabin. He would do a little sleuthing on his own accord. He remembered the window on that side of the building, and if he could get to it undetected, he might solve a little of the mystery.

Lowering himself to his hands and knees, he crawled with catlike caution across the clearing and raised his eyes to a level with the sill. He could hear voices and made out those of Myra's father and Craddock, but it was several minutes before he became accustomed to the change in light so that he could discern the occupants of the room.

Then he saw Craddock standing before Carlin, and beside the old man sat

his daughter. Big Timber felt a little thrill at sight of the girl.

Craddock was shaking his fist at the older man. "You were sent up here to do one thing, Carlin," he roared. "And judgin by what's going on, you've bungled your job. Getting chicken-hearted, that's what! If you'd used you head and shot a little straighter when that fellow Overton and his companion were up here cruising, you'd not find yourself in such a jack pot now."

Big Timber felt his muscles tighten. He looked at Myra. Her face had blanched, and he could see that she was struggling to control some emotion within her. Carlin's expression was that of a whipped dog.

"I—I can't murder a man in cold blood, Craddock," he whined.

"You can't, eh?" retorted the other. "You're getting mighty good all of a sudden. Maybe if you saw yourself breaking rock at the penitentiary, you'd change your mind." He pointed an accusing finger at the other. "Listen," he cried. "The Consolidated is waiting for me to say the word, and you'll be put over the road. You can save yourself in two ways. Either pay back that five thousand dollars, or stop this logging operation. If you think you can raise the money easier, just say so."

Carlin was trembling now. He looked at the younger man wildly. "No—no, I can't raise the money. But I'll stop them, give me a little time."

"You've had plenty of time, already. Now I'm going to take a hand, and if you play along you're safe. Otherwise, you take the jolt. I'll have a bunch of men up here to-morrow to help you. They don't know much about the timber, but they haven't any consciences." Craddock turned on Myra. "And I expect you to help, unless you want your dad to take the consequences."

Big Timber watched the girl. She appeared to wilt under his words.

"What do you say?" he demanded.

She inclined her head.

"All right, then, see that you both do your stuff," he said with finality as he turned toward the door.

Realizing that he must not be caught eavesdropping, Big Timber sank to the ground and hurried back into the woods. Once in the protection of the big trees. he sped back to camp.

He went to the commissary, but there was no sign of Willapa. After looking about, he made inquiries concerning the little fellow at the cook shack. The cook informed him that Willapa had been away most of the morning, and had returned only an hour before; then he left for town, saying he would be back the next day.

Swearing softly to himself, Big Timber retraced his steps to the commissary. Just when he needed him most, the little runt had run off! His lack of enthusiasm about the whole proposition had been a source of irritation to Big Timber. Could it be possible that his partner was planning on pulling out on him? Well, if he was, he'd have to go on fighting alone. It was evident that Craddock was determined to stop his operations. He slumped dejectedly into a chair. It was his luck to buck up against a thing like this. At the time when he had a chance to make the first stake of his lifetime, something had to happen. He felt a sense of poignant disappointment in Myra. Somehow he had figured that a girl like that could not be mixed up in a murderous scheme. Yet her acquiescence in Craddock's suggestion that she play her part was sufficient proof of her intentions.

CHAPTER V.

A WARNING.

A SHOUT from the woods brought Big Timber out of his reverie. The men were coming in for lunch. He glanced out of the window. The crew were striding down the trail, lead by

Long Tom Sander. They were singing a logging chantey as they swung along, reckless good nature written on their begrimed faces.

He smiled proudly. A loyal bunch of timber beasts. He could depend on them at all costs. He would not be reluctant to attack an army of crooks, if he could face them in the open with the Roaring River men behind him. Wearily he got up and crossed to the cook shack, where he joined the noisy crew as they fell upon their noonday meal.

Long Tom Sander studied his expression as he came in. Then the tall hook tender burst into a loud guffaw. "Look, fellows," he cried, pointing a long finger at Big Timber. "Take a peak at Old Man Gloom, in person!"

The logging boss forced a grin as he sat down beside Long Tom.

"Say, why all the misery on your map?" demanded the hook tender, when they had finished. "Here we've got the sweetes' an' easies' job in years, an' you go an' wear a long face." He turned to the others. "We're the ones who oughta be howlin', ain't we, men? Big Timber promised us some action an' he ain't delivered it."

This was met with a roar of laughter.

"You may get it yet," warned Big Timber. "According to things I heard to-day, you may have a fight before you know it."

"Great news!" shouted Long Tom, and the others loudly agreed. "What's happened?"

"Can't tell you now, but as soon as I find out what the nature of it is, you'll hear about it." And in spite of further questioning, he refused to disclose anything.

But that afternoon when he made his daily tour of inspection up the valley, he kept a sharp lookout for any sign that would give a hint of Craddock's procedure. The man's motive was another thing he puzzled over. Apparently, he did not want the timber himself, yet with a dog-in-the-manger attitude he did not want any one else to cut it.

Willapa's disappearance was another cause of concern. Never before had the little fellow left camp for town unless Big Timber knew about it, or accompanied him. And since he had always consulted his partner on every move he made, this sudden action was all the more perplexing.

That night, after the lights had blinked out in the bunk houses, Big Timber sat alone in the commissary. Midsummer humidity hung over the valley, and through the door came the sough of the hot, upland wind as it swished among the tops of the giant spruce near the camp. In the distance he could hear the sullen grumble of the Mad River, its cadence rising and falling on the breast of the breeze.

As he thumbed through the production sheets of the day, he suddenly became conscious of a movement in the doorway behind him. Whirling in his chair, he faced Myra Carlin. She was closing the door as she darted an interrogatory look about the room.

She met his wondering gaze with a wan smile.

"I hope I'm not intruding?" she asked.

"Not at all," he replied, getting to his feet. "Won't you sit down?" He indicated a chair.

"No, thanks, I can't stay." Her face sobered, and again she looked around nervously. "I shouldn't be here, but—but I wanted to come and warn you."

She stepped closer. "It's about this timber you bought. Did you know there was a fight going on over it when you bought it?"

Big Timber shook his head.

"I didn't think you did," she went on. "The Consolidated Electric Co. wants to make Mad River one of its big chain of power development, but it can't get hold of this land. A man by the name of

Crumpacker owns the timber rights, and because of a long bitterness toward the Consolidated, he will never sell to them.

"As soon as it is logged, the power rights revert to the American Power Co., which is a rival of the Consolidated. That's why the Consolidated doesn't want it logged. A man by the name of Craddock is trying to get it for the company, and it will mean a fortune for him if he does. Crumpacker tried to log it, but Craddock frightened him off and killed one of his men. Now they are determined to run you out, and they won't stop at anything. That's why I wanted to warn you." She smiled wistfully. "You see, Mr. Overton, I feel that I owe you something for pulling me out of the river."

Big Timber did not speak for a moment. It seemed as though a tremendous load had been lifted off his mind. So that was the cause of all the trouble! And that was why Crumpacker was so secretive. Yet he was willing to have him come up here and get shot, though, and maybe killed. Suddenly, Big Timber's resentment rose against him. But he smiled at the girl.

"I sure thank you for telling me this. I guess I've got a bigger battle on my hands than I thought."

"Yes, if you go on with the logging. you'll have to fight; but I'm afraid you won't have much chance. It won't be clean and in the open, and I know Craddock well enough to feel sure he'll let nothing stop him. That's why I came to-night. He's going to have a bunch of his rough men up here to-morrow, and they have been ordered to see that you and your crew are driven out."

Big Timber felt something surge within him. "That's fine," he ejaculated. "We'll be ready for them."

The girl's eyes grew round. "But you can't fight them," she protested. "You'll be killed. I overheard some of Craddock's plans. He's instructed the men to make you a prisoner first. They're going to lay for you on the upper trail. That's what I came to tell you. If you go up the river to-morrow, please do not go that way. Follow the river bank and keep a sharp lookout, if you must go." She moved toward the door.

"Wait," said Big Timber. "You can't go back through the woods alone."

"Oh, no, please do not come," she cried. "I'm accustomed to going about at night, and it wouldn't be safe for either of us to be seen together." She hurried to the door as though fearful that he might follow. "If you insist on logging this timber, you will be careful, won't you?"

The man laughed. "I'll be careful, an' I plan on logging this stand, too."

She gave him a warm smile and the next instant she was gone. He went to the door and watched her cross the clearing, but just as she reached the margin of the timber, he thought he perceived another shadow join her and disappear up the trail with her.

Turning slowly back into the room, Big Timber chuckled grimly to himself. Well, the mystery had been cleared, but it looked as if he were up against a tough proposition. He had heard of the Consolidated before. When they went out to get water rights, they let nothing stop them.

He recalled the conversation he had heard in the Carlin cabin, and especially that part of it when the girl had agreed to help Craddock in his plans. Was it possible that her visit was a part of this scheme? Her fear that he might go back with her, and the other shadow that appeared to have accompanied her, substantiated this suspicion.

It was not a pleasant conclusion to come to, this thought that Myra would double cross him. He had hoped for something else, but he had spent his life in the frontier timberlands and he was prepared to meet disappointments.

Now that the Mad River situation had

been clarified, the problem at its worst did not look hopeless. There was only one thing to do and that was to act. He could not afford to wait for Craddock to move first. He would meet the power interests at their own game and give them a surprise.

He walked across to his bunk house and crawled in between the blankets. Sleep quickly overtook him, but before he drifted into slumber he had formulated his plans. He was thankful he had the Roaring River gang with him. They would back him in anything, and he knew they would agree to his strategy.

The next morning he called Long Tom aside. "Keep the Roaring River boys here this morning, Tom," he instructed. "Say nothing to the others."

Long Tom's eyes sparkled. "Somethin' up, Big Timber?" he inquired.

"Yes, we've got a little job on our hands. There's a bunch of skunks going to be up here to-day an' we got to let them know who we are."

Long Tom grinned. "Big Timber, we knew we could depend on you. We thought maybe at first you might be spoofin' us 'bout there goin' to be trouble." He strode away, and a few moments later when the crew started for the woods, Big Timber saw the Roaring River men one by one casually leave and go to their bunk houses.

Willapa had failed to put in an appearance, and this discovery disturbed his partner. He needed the little fellow to-day, and now that he knew Craddock's plans, he was not a little worried about him.

After the men had gone, he called the Roaring River group together and told them in detail of the Consolidated's determination to put them out.

"Now listen, boys," he concluded. "I've got a hunch a certain party was trying to play me into Craddock's hands. I was told that Craddock would have his men waiting for me on the trail, and was urged to follow the river if I went up there to-day. The chances are that his men will be laying for me along the river, so we'll just slip up the trail, and then come down on them from above. We'll give Craddock a little surprise by going out to meet him and playing his game. Each one of you equip yourself with a bunch of short pieces of rope. We'll hog tie those roughs and turn them over to the authorities for trespassing."

A few minutes later he led his men through the heavy timber toward the trail that led up the river. They took a circuitous route to prevent any chance of being seen, moving noiselessly among the thick trees.

He stopped them once when they were above the Carlin cabin. Calling Billy Stanton, a rigging slinger, aside, he instructed him to go to the clearing and keep a lookout on the occupants of the building.

"Remember, Billy," he cautioned, "I don't want the girl or her father hurt, but I also don't want either of them to get wind of what we're doing an' get to town. Tie them up, if necessary, but see that they don't get away."

Stanton nodded and dropped down the valley as the men proceeded. After an hour's travel, Big Timber called another halt. "Listen, men," he said, "I'm going on alone so that there won't be a chance of that gang knowing what we're up to. You follow as far behind as you can without losing sight of me. If any trouble starts, you come running."

He strode on ahead, his eyes alert and his ears keen to every sound. When he had traveled for another mile, he paused. He had about reached the limit of his daily tour, and no one had appeared. He smiled to himself. He had been right about Myra. Craddock's men were down below along the river waiting for him, just as he had expected. There was a pang of disappointment in this thought. He had still hoped to

prove her right, and find them waiting for him on the trail. He would go on a little farther and stop for his men, then swing down to the water and start on his way back.

The trail at this point made a sharp turn around a small bluff. and just as Big Timber reached the curve, a spray of gravel fell from above. He spun around and glanced up in time to see a large individual launch himself through the air at him. Some twenty others followed.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN TIMBER BEASTS BATTLE.

THE big man leaped in time to keep from being struck, but in doing so he stumbled and fell backward off the trail. He was up the next instant and squared to meet them, as his assailants bore down upon him. In that bewildering second, he saw they had no guns in their hands, and he felt relieved as he met the first with a terrific blow in the face. The man went down in a heap at his feet, but several others leaped over the prostrate body and were upon him, each one trying to grab and hold him.

An exultation born of the love of a battle and the knowledge that the Roaring River crew would be there any moment, swept over Big Timber as he lashed out his great fists and drove them with pile-driver force into that charging crowd. He scanned the men to see if Craddock were among them, but he heard his voice coming from the hillside above. He looked up and saw Craddock waving instructions to his men.

"Get him, you fellows!" he was yelling.

They surged at him once more and the big logger backed away, fighting with marked coolness. He knew they would get at him in a moment if Long Tom didn't hurry up with his men, but now Craddock's crowd were getting in each other's way, in their eagerness to get their hands on him.

Big Timber dropped another assailant with a crushing blow on the jaw. Then another dived forward and grabbed him by the legs. He went down with several more on top of him. They rained blows upon him as he kicked and fought back.

At that moment the timber echoed with a ringing shout.

"Go get 'em, timber beasts! Go get 'em!" It was the Roaring River battle cry.

Big Timber heard Craddock bark a warning. Instantly, Long Tom Sander, followed by eight men, charged. All but one of the men on top of him jumped to meet the attack, but that one was a powerful man and he worked his hands to Big Timber's throat.

Struggle as hard as he could, the big fellow was unable to break that hold, and he felt the other's fingers tightening. The cries of the Roaring River loggers, the impact of flesh against flesh, and the grunting of straining bodies came to him as he fought to get loose.

Ceasing his efforts for a brief second, he relaxed his muscles. His assailant, evidently thinking he had overpowered him, raised his weight. In a flash Big Timber drew one boot up and placed it in the other's body. With a heave, he straightened his leg. A heavy groan came from the big man's lips as he was lifted and thrown ten feet down the slope, his body crashing with stunning force against the trunk of a tree. He rolled over and lay still.

Big Timber was on his feet again. Everywhere, men were battling. His hasty survey showed him that his own crew was outnumbered two to one, but he also saw that the Roaring River men were still on their feet.

Then he caught sight of Craddock, who had slipped down from the bank and stood some distance away. In his hand he held a gun and he was ma-

neuvering to get an aim on Long Tom, who was locked in a struggle with a fierce combatant.

Big Timber leaped through the air. Craddock, unaware of the coming assault, whirled a moment too late. He fired his gun in the logger's face and the flame singed his forehead, but the shot went wild and Big Timber's fist landed on the other's chin. Craddock went down, but, as he did so, he made another effort to pull the trigger. Big Timber sprang at him, and drove a second blow into his face, at the same time wrenching the gun from him and throwing it into the brush beside the trail.

As he started to rise, a jab from the rear caught him behind the ear and he dropped to his knees, dazed. A terrific weight struck him and bore him to the ground. Face downward, he lay there, but his head cleared quickly and he turned to see Craddock rising, his countenance twisted with rage.

Seeing Big Timber down, an avid light shot into his black eyes as he came forward, his boot upraised. But at the same time, Long Tom settled his opponent with his fist, and wheeled on Craddock. The boot never landed, for Long Tom's hit lifted him off his feet and he sank, limp and inert, beside Big Timber.

Next, Long Tom swung on the man who was on his boss and he rolled over unconscious. Pulling Big Timber to his feet, Long Tom grinned through his puffed lips. "C'mon, big boy," he yelled. "We've got 'em."

They viewed the scene. Most of Craddock's men were tied or lying unconscious, and the Roaring River loggers, now with the upper hand, were losing no time in seeing that all the victims were bound.

Big Timber turned on Craddock, who had regained consciousness. They were tying his feet and hands, while he looked on groggily, his eyes flashing hatred.

A low rumbling roar suddenly echoed across the valley and rolled up to them. Big Timber and Long Tom looked at each other questioningly. Then the noise of another explosion came to their ears from somewhere below.

"Sounds like dynamite, boss," surmised Long Tom.

Big Timber whirled and raced up the embankment to a point where he could see out over the valley. The first thing that met his gaze was a cloud of yellow smoke, billowing up from the place where the camp lay. As he watched, it grew in volume.

"Good gosh, Tom!" he called. "The camp's on fire! An' it looks like it's already got a start in the timber!"

A raucous chuckle came from Craddock's throat. Both men spun around and faced him.

"I guess that'll teach you a lesson, Overton," Craddock sneered. "You thought you pulled a fast one coming up here with your men, but I went you one better. You'll wish you'd sold to me when you see what that dynamite has done to your camp and donkey engines."

Big Timber stared at him incredulously for several minutes. When he spoke his voice was hard and brittle. "Craddock, you're a dolt." he said. "Maybe you've ruined me—I suppose you have; but if that fire gets away down there—and with the timber as dry as it is, there's every chance that it will—you've also killed the prospects of the Consolidated ever getting these power rights. Burned-off land is just like logged-off land, and they'll revert to the American Power Co. I know they'll appreciate what you've done for them," he finished sarcastically.

Craddock's mouth dropped open as the truth was borne in on him.

Big Timber was talking to Long Tom. "You stay here with these fellows an' bring them down when they all get their senses back. I'm heading for camp to see what I can do, which is very little, except look on, if that fire's got under

way." He started on a run down the trail.

He was thankful it was downhill, and he made good time. Occasionally through the trees he could see the increasing size of the columns of smoke, and fifteen minutes later, when he came out on the level valley below, his heart sank within him as he heard the roar of the flames and saw them leaping among the tops of the big firs.

The fire had gained such headway when he got down to the timber he had been logging that he found it necessary to circle back against the hill and go around it. As he came out on the river below he found the rest of his crew fighting desperately to start sufficient backfires.

"How did it get going?" he asked one of the men.

"Some son of a gun dynamited the donkey engine, an' the blaze sprang up in so many places from the coals, that we couldn't stop it. They also blowed up the cook shack, an' that sprouted the fires down yonder."

Big Timber made a hurried investigation of the situation. There was no question but that the best part of the timber was doomed. Already a blanket of flames, spreading from the water to the base of the mountain, was sweeping up the river. He studied the wind and found that it was in the right direction to help the blaze. He sent one of the men to call in the others.

"Tell them it's no use to fight it. The timber's gone. She'll probably burn out before she gets up the ridge to where Tom and the boys are. Anyway, he can take his captives over the edge and bring them down on the other side. But the best of our stuff will be lost, it's almost gone already. We might as well call it quits."

As he walked sadly toward the smoldering remains of the cook shack and bunk houses, he saw Billy Stanton, whom he had sent up to the Carlin cabin, come running toward him excitedly. He was followed by Carlin who was almost in a state of collapse.

"Big Timber!" Stanton shouted. "That girl's tied up there in that cabin, and the fire's almost there! What'll we do?"

"What?" cried Big Timber. "Who tied her?"

"I did. You told me to watch the house, an' when she tried to leave, the only way I could keep her there was with a rope. When the explosion went off I came down to see if I could help." Big Timber's face went white. Carlin saw the expression and a look of hopeless horror came into his sunken eyes.

"Can't you do something?" he pleaded. "Can't you get her out?"

"Where have you been? Why didn't you go up there when the fire started?"

"I didn't know she was tied until this man told me after he had tried to go back and get her. Anyway, I was down here trying to find you to warn you of Craddock's plans. I decided I would rather suffer any consequences than help him in his crooked tricks. But I got here too late." He groaned, agonized.

CHAPTER VII.

RUNNING THE FIRE GANTLET.

BUT Big Timber did not wait to hear more. The fire had already reached the mouth of the small canyon, and there was only the barest chance that any one could get through to the cabin before the blaze.

He remembered the small creek which they had followed that first day. That was the only way he could go and get there in time. And it would be like running the gantlet to try it. But he had to make the attempt. Myra had not double crossed him, after all, and even if she had, he could not let her perish without doing something to aid her.

Taking a course along the river bank, he threw all caution to the winds as he

sped along. Above, giant trees enveloped in flames showered him with sparks and fire brands, and great burning limbs crashed down on all sides of him as he went. Much of the time he had to leap into the water to circle around blazing logs and fallen trees.

When he came to the place where the creek flowed into the river, he hesitated only a moment as he looked up its source and saw what lay before him. Then he dipped down and soaked himself in the water and hurried up the bed of the stream. In a few minutes, his wet clothes were steaming from the terrific heat that baked him on both sides, and his face was blistered raw.

Time after time he was forced to dodge as a flaming tree threatened his path, or a whistling swish from overhead warned him that another limb was falling.

As he finally caught sight of the cabin, his heart momentarily quickened when he perceived that it was still untouched, though it was entirely surrounded by the burning forest.

Putting every ounce of his strength into his stride, he raced forward. Gasping and choking, he reached the door and flung it open. Sitting in a chair, her hands and feet securely bound, was Myra. The despair in her eyes vanished and her face filled with joy as he dropped beside her and began cutting her bindings.

"Mr.—Mr.—oh, Big Timber!" she cried gratefully. "I'm so glad you have come. I had given up all hope."

"I'm glad I'm here, too, Myra," he panted. "But it's not over yet." He led her to the door. "Our only hope is back the way I came, an' it's dangerous." He took a coat from the wall and soaked it in the water bucket near the door. "Here, wrap this around your head an' let's go!"

As they made their way down the small creek, the fire had reached its peak in that section. Every moment Big Timber expected to be crushed under some falling tree. But with eyes judging the roaring furnace above him, they worked their way back to the river, stopping only to soak their clothes.

When they came to the larger stream, he discovered to his horror that progress either up or down its banks had been made impossible by the thousands of trees that had toppled into the water, their ends sticking far out, and their exposed trunks were masses of burning coals.

The girl saw their plight, too. "What can we do?" she asked. "Those trees above us are about ready to fall, too."

Big Timber looked around frantically and his eye came to rest on one of his own logs that had floated down the river and grounded lightly near them. He ran over and by putting his shoulder to it worked it into deeper water.

"Here's our only chance," he called to the girl. "Come on!"

She held back. "We can never ride that log down this torrent!" she exclaimed.

Without further words, Big Timber rushed to her and picked her up in his arms. As he hurried back to the log, there came to his mind what Willapa had said about his being the one man who could ride a log down that river. Now was his time to prove it, singed to the inner flesh, without a peavey, and with a girl in his arms.

He set Myra down and grimly pushed the log out into the water where it caught the rush of the current. Then, knowing full well that on his feet was the only way he could hope to meet the spin of the big stick, he picked her up and again and leaped upon it as it swung into midstream.

For a few minutes it moved along easily, and Big Timber braced his feet for what he knew would come when it caught the full force of that turbulent water. Ahead of them, the white churning foam of the first rapids came into

view. The log bore down on them with increasing speed.

"Can—can you handle it?" gasped the girl.

"I'm going to try, Myra," promised Big Timber, his eyes fixed on the end of the sticks as it started to roll.

The next moment it was spinning as it was tossed along in the power of the angry swirl. Big Timber's feet danced as he met the spin. Never before had he seen undertaken such a log-rolling feat. It would have been difficult enough without a burden in his arms, but with the added unbalancing weight he was afraid every moment that his calks would tear loose, and they would be pitched into the icy flood.

Farther on, as they came out into a level stretch, he breathed easier and looked at Myra. Her eyes were wide with pride. "You're a most wonderful man, Big Timber!" she fervently told him.

He felt his heart begin to pound. But the big log started to rock again as they swung into the next expanse of rough water and his interest was concentrated on his task. The front end was hurled upward. Big Timber's foot slipped. A frightened cry came from Myra as he dropped to one knee. But he was up again before he lost his balance.

So engrossed were they both in this struggle with the mad waters that they were unaware of their location until a shout from the shore arrested their attention.

"There's your crew, Big Timber!" the girl exclaimed.

He looked and saw the men on the banks waving their hats with joy. Several of them had already leaped into the water and were waiting with peavies to stop the log.

As it drifted by, one of the men swam out with a rope and made it fast. Others quickly drew it shoreward. Big Timber jumped into the shallow water and waded toward the edge. Myra slipped from him to run up the bank and throw herself into the arms of her father.

Big Timber started to climb up the bank, when he stopped short and gaped open-mouthed at an object before him. Dressed in a suit of large check and bright hues, with a crimson tie and a brown derby, stood Willapa Pete. He removed a long cigar from his mouth and grinned down at his partner.

"Hello, son!" he called cheerfully. "I see you've raised the particular dickens up here while I was gone."

"Willapa!" shouted Big Timber, as he again surveyed his ornate partner. "Willapa, what in the deuce have you done? Don't you know we're broke flatter'n a pancake?"

Willapa laughed, showing his almost toothless gums. "Who said we was broke?"

"I did," retorted the big man, his anger rising. "Our timber an' camp've gone up in flames. It's good-by to that Cedar Gulch deal."

"Good-by to Cedar Gulch?" repeated Willapa, with a grandiose gesture. "Why, heck, big boy, you've been so busy fightin' an' savin' beautiful girls that you ain't heard nothin'! I've already wired that two thousand to Harrington."

"What!" Big Timber fairly screamed the word.

"Yep, that's the truth," admitted Willapa. "You remember those little rocks I picked up that first day we was here? Well, while you were loggin', I did some prospectin' an' discovered a lot more of 'em with nice yellow stuff in 'em, an' when I went to town yesterday, I sold our option on the claim for ten thousand dollars. Some fellows knew about it, but never could locate just where it was."

Big Timber sank limply on a fallen tree and dropped his blistered face in his hands. The realization of their good fortune and Willapa's part in it overwhelmed him. He felt a light touch on

his shoulder and lifted his head. Myra stood beside him, her eyes filled with tears.

"Big Timber," she said. "I want first to thank you and then to congratulate you. You surely deserve it all."

For the moment, he could not summon the words he wanted to speak. Then to his mind came what Craddock had predicted would happen to her father.

"Thank—thank you, Myra," he replied. "But—but we've got to do something about your father. He can't go to prison. I overheard Craddock in your cabin when he threatened you both."

Willapa had come forward and put his arm across Big Timber's shoulders. "Big boy, again you're way behind your little pardner. I've already agreed to advance that money to him. He didn't steal it, anyway, but was just the goat in a frame-up of Craddock's. He's coming down to Cedar Gulch with us. He's an expert bookkeeper, which means I don't have to push a pencil any more." A mischievous light filled his beady eyes. "I'm thinkin' about retirin'."

TO AID RESEARCH IN IRON ALLOYS

ANNOUNCEMENT was recently made by the Engineering Foundation of New York of a project for fundamental research in iron alloys. In pursuance of this, the sum of one hundred and fifty thousand dollars is to be devoted to a five-year review of all the available material on the subject. The research is inspired by the opinion of the authorities in this field that the industrial future of the United States will depend largely on increasing scientific knowledge of the combination of iron.

The material gathered in this research is to be coördinated in a series of monographs and manuals; and industrial, educational, and governmental agencies are expected to coöperate in the undertaking.

The foundation explains in its announcement that it is felt that the future of the iron and steel industry will be greatly affected by its position in the field of alloy irons and steels. This position cannot be maintained and advanced in the present swift-moving world merely through the gradual accumulation of knowledge by individual manufacturers. The projected coöperative research was decided upon as the best and most efficient method of increasing such knowledge.

The foundation has already made appropriations for two such research enterprises in association with its project, one at Lehigh and the other at Carnegie Institute of Technology.

A FROG RODEO

A FROG rodeo that was recently held in Angeles Camp, California, must have been a noticeably picturesque attraction for even a colorful State. The rodeo, a revival of the classic described by Mark Twain in "The Jumping Frog of Calvareras County," drew some fifteen thousand spectators, who cheered lustily at each fresh development.

The amphibian rodeo was held in the middle of Main Street in this old mining camp. Fifty-one frogs participated, although some of the weaker of this number were quickly eliminated in the preliminary leaps that were held to weed out the less physically fit.

The best jumpers toed the mark. And the upshot of the excitement was that "Jumping Frog of San Joaquin" won the rodeo with a leap of almost four feet.

Western Taught

By Howard E. Morgan

Author of "Two Bad Men," etc.

UNFORTUNATELY, Eli Zachariah Kahoon was the exact antithesis of the euphonious promise conveyed by his initials. Some of the more flippant of Willet Corners' younger set did, in jest, call him "E. Z.," but "Shylock" was the nickname that fitted him best; and as Shylock he was known in Willet Corners and throughout Calvin County.

Along with his many other interests, Shylock owned and operated the general store at Willet Corners. It was in late November, or early December—just before Christmas, anyhow—when Shylock's adventure with "Buck" Wedlow, that unfortunate young man from the West, took place.

It was a cold, rainy night, typical of New England in general at that time of the year. Shylock was alone in the store, for it was Tuesday—an odd night—hence, customers were few and far between. By the light of a single lamp, Shylock was checking several long columns of figures in a much-thumbed ledger. With his sharp-angled face bent low over the little book, he bore an amazing resemblance to a cormorant, that voracious bird of prey. He had checked the figures in the worn gray book for the third time, and had just about decided that the cost of burning that single electric light would probably amount to more than the profit to be derived from the one or two chance customers who might wander in, when the rickety old door rattled open and Buck Wedlow entered.

Of course, Shylock Kahoon did not know Buck. When the old miser looked

up, he saw merely a dark-skinned young man, roughly dressed, with a several days' growth of beard hiding his weather-browned cheeks. Shylock's face puckered into what was intended to be an ingratiating smile. The stranger shuffled across the floor with a curiously awkward gait, his wet clothes exuding water as he moved. Shylock's quick eyes discovered that the reason for the young man's queer gait was the high-heeled shoes—boots—which he wore.

"Yessir, what can I do for you?" he inquired politely.

The stranger was evidently ill at ease. He shuffled from one foot to the other, but his blue eyes met Shylock's fairly.

"It—it's like this, old-timer," the young man stammered. "I'm broke. Flat. Ain't had a bite to eat for two days. I——"

Shylock Kahoon laughed unpleasantly. "That's enough," he snarled, "you needn't go no further. I've heard that story so many times I'm sick of listenin' to it." He pointed angrily toward the door. "Get out!" he said.

"But, listen t' me a minute, mister," the young man pleaded; "I ain't beggin'. I got money, back home. Not much, but enough. I got took in by——"

"I don't want to hear your story, young man," Shylock interrupted, "you didn't see a 'Free Lunch' sign on the front of this door, did you? No. And, unfortunately, there are no charitable organizations in this town."

"But, just a bite t' eat, old-timer," the stranger begged. "Some crackers and cheese. An' I ain't beggin' even for that," he hastened to add. "I'll send you money—ten times the value of whatever you stake me for—the minute I get back home. I hail from Lowry City, Arizona, an' my name's Buck Wedlow. I——"

But Shylock Kahoon had come swiftly out from behind the counter. He was a big man, and as he came toward the shivering stranger he looked more than ever like a bird of prey. He laid a strong hand on Buck Wedlow's coat collar and urged "the beggar" ungently toward the door. Buck would have fought back if he had had the strength; but he was exhausted from cold, exposure, and lack of food.

Shylock Kahoon pulled the door open, and with a farewell shove and kick, delivered simultaneously, he removed the beggar from the doorstep of the store into the middle of the mud roadway.

In the months that followed, things did not go so well with Shylock Kahoon. Willet Corners suddenly shed its swaddling clothes and began blossoming out into a prosperous village. New, up-to-date stores with red fronts appeared—two of them. There was also a new drug store, and a gasoline station; a garage replaced the livery stable. Shylock's receipts began to fall off in an alarming manner. No longer was he able to take a profit of fifty per cent on his low-grade merchandise. Those two little stores with the red fronts offered better quality at lower prices.

So it was that, in the early summer, Shylock Kahoon closed up his little store and most of his other business interests in Willet Corners and boarded a train for Chicago and points west.

In starting out, the miser had no definite goal in mind. He would make money wherever he landed; of that he was sure. He had never yet failed to make money. Why should he fail now?

The West appealed to him very strongly. He was a great reader. Stories with a Western flavor always pleased him. He was particularly fond of those stories that had to do with the digging of gold from the ground. The making of money was to him a fetish, the ruling passion of his life. He had made money in a great many different ways; but, so far, he had never taken raw gold out of the ground. This means of acquiring wealth appealed to

him as the ultimate of all that was desirable. Crude gold! That precious, beautiful, yellow stuff! A thousand times he had visioned himself picking nuggets out of the dirt as he had been used to dig potatoes in his back yard.

It was all very fascinating, that great West which he read about in the second-hand magazines which he bought for a song on a little side street in Boston. And he was in no particular hurry to settle down. He would look things over, travel around a bit through that great West about which he had read so much. Other men had found gold there. Why not he? He had always been lucky.

But it was destined that Shylock Kahoon's desire to search for gold was to be temporarily sidetracked. He had a brother in Denver, much older than himself, whose disposition and appearance had been cast in the same mold. Brother Andrew was, however, a bit more open in his methods. Andrew operated in a little store on a side street above the door of which were three brass balls. The bulk of Brother Andrew's business, however, was in the form of mortgages; and when he discovered that Sylock's destination was the West, his thoughts immediately turned to the thing nearest his heart.

"I've got a proposition here for you, Eli," he said; "it's an A-1 mortgage on a ranch down near Los Torros, Arizona. The Diamond Bar, it's called, and old Silas Todd, who runs it, is in a hole up to his neck—most of the time. I've kept a close check on him, and I'm pretty sure that he'll fail this year. The Diamond Bar is a good ranch. I'll foreclose, of course. Now, how would you like to go down there and take care of the foreclosure for me? I'll give you a good, liberal commission——"

But Shylock Kahoon was not interested in a commission. After considerable haggling, he purchased the mortgage outright from his brother.

So, a few weeks later, Shylock Kahoon arrived at Los Torros, that sun-baked little town on the edge of the desert, on his way to the Diamond Bar Ranch.

While traveling southward on the train, Shylock had been tremendously impressed by the vast stretches of rolling, open country. He liked it. And those mountains standing up there so majestically in the distance—that was where the gold came from. They were beautiful! thought Shylock.

Long before he reached Los Torros, Shylock was literally gold mad. As he rode westward out of that town on a little ramshackle old train which would take him to a junction where he could hire a rig to reach the Diamond Bar Ranch, his thoughts were occupied to the exclusion of all else with those towering mountains and the gold that might be found—by a lucky man—somewhere beneath their rocky armor.

Chance had it that this day a sand slide—a frequent occurrence—should halt the little train that bore Shylock Kahoon westward at the base of a great towering rock pile called Snake Mountain.

For half an hour or more, Shylock sat quietly in the train while the crew cleared the tracks. Never for an instant did his greedy eyes leave the upward-sloping expanse of rock that was the side of the mountain. And, as he sat there, the desire grew upon him to climb that mountain, to search here and there in the rocky crevices for gold. He registered a mental vow to return to Snake Mountain as soon as he had finished his business at the Diamond Bar Ranch.

The sand slide, it soon developed, had been of unusually large proportions. The conductor finally came through the train announcing that it would be at least four or five hours before the track would be cleared, and inviting the few passengers to get out and "stretch their laigs."

Shylock Kahoon obeyed this suggestion with alacrity.

His feet sank deep in the warm soft sand. He liked the sensation. With his eyes fixed on the outjutting mountain ledges far above, he started upward.

At the end of half an hour, he had reached the first of the serrated ledges that make up the body of Snake Mountain. Down below, the train crew was still busy. From a distance, it looked as though they had little more than begun their task of clearing the sand-covered tracks.

Assuring himself that it certainly would be several hours before the track was cleared, Shylock again started upward. But, this time, he did not go far. Abruptly, his quick eyes discovered something glistening on the face of the rocky wall, perhaps a hundred feet distant. That glistening something ran in a narrow ribbon of golden brightness about ten feet across the face of the mountain. Shylock changed his position slightly, but, whichever way he turned, that glistening strip of metal looked yellow—a beautiful, golden yellow. The miser's heart pounded like a trip hammer.

Although that inviting strip of gold—Shylock was certain that it was gold—was no more than a hundred feet distant in the air, there was a gravel-littered gully with almost perpendicular sides intervening. With only a momentary hesitation, the gold-hungry man started down that shifting slope. Shifting it certainly was. Slipping, sliding, struggling for balance, he moved faster and faster toward the bottom of the rock-littered ravine. The whole body of the mountainside seemed to travel downward with him. His feet were still. And then, the unexpected happened. Half choked, blinded by powdery dust, he struggled wildly. But he might just as well have submitted to the inevitable. The sand and gravel, gaining in impetus as they went, bowled him over and over at express-train speed. He landed among the loose rocks at the bottom of the ravine accompanied by a torrent of débris. His head struck against a boulder. The yellow sand went red, then black, before his eyes.

When the embryo prospector finally struggled back to consciousness his first thought was of that strip of gold—a "vein" they called it in the books—up there on that rocky slope perhaps a hundred feet above him. He glanced hastily at his watch, but found that the impact of his fall had stopped it. His head was sore and he was very thirsty, but neither discomfort served to set aside his stubborn desire to investigate that vein of gold. He shook himself free of the sand and gravel which had rolled down upon him and once more started upward.

If the descent into that gully had been painful, the ascent was no less so. A thousand and one sharp-edged rocks cut his tender hands and barked his shins when he fell, as he frequently did. But the man's stubborn nature was not to be denied. Inch by inch he made his way up the face of that almost perpendicular wall. His throat was parched now. His tongue seemed too big for his mouth. But there was water on the train; plenty of it. He just wanted to check that vein, then he would hurry on. But he would return——

The gold-mad man lost all track of time. If he had been told that it took him three hours to climb that wall, he would have laughed. But that is exactly what happened. He could not locate the strip of gold at first. He spent the better part of another hour inching his way around the face of the cliff, searching through eager eyes for that vein of gold. It was gone! He pulled himself higher on a narrow ledge and carefully measured the expanse of gray rock at his back, at the same time trying to put himself in the position he had been in back there across the gully, when he

had first discovered that golden strip. He finally decided upon almost the exact spot. He got out his penknife then, and scraped away at the colorless stone. The soft sandstone chipped away easily enough, and finally he found it. But it was not gold. Even Shylock knew that. It looked more like mica. It was mica. The sun shining on it had made it look like gold.

He was, of course, disappointed. But he was not discouraged, far from it! He looked at his watch again, forgetting that it was broken. Failing to learn anything from the big silver timepiece, he looked for the sun. It was there, right enough, a huge, dull-red ball, well up in the sky. He could not tell east from west, hence, he did not know whether it was before or after midday. He judged that it must be before. That being the case, he still had plenty of time to get back to the train. A toilsome journey faced him, however, and he would be obliged to hurry.

Wisely, he made no attempt to find a short cut back to the train. He returned by the way he had come, down the rocky slope up which he had toiled and up the gravelly wall on the opposite side of the ravine.

He was almost exhausted when he reached the point from which he had started. There was a lump on the back of his head, and his thirst was torturing. He brushed the back of his hand across his mouth, and drew it away flecked with red from his cracked lips. Groaning, he stumbled on, visioning in his mind's eye water in various enticing surroundings. When he finally came within sight of the railroad track, his first thought was that he had, in some manner, become lost. The track was there, but the train was gone. It was not until he had stumbled back and forth, up and down the track, that he realized that the train had gone on without him!

Despite his many meannesses, Shylock Kahoon possessed a stubborn streak—inherited, no doubt, from his hard-handed forbear—which without too greatly stretching the truth, might be called courage. Just now, however, his was the courage of a cornered rat. Even as he stood, there, swaying dizzily, trying to decide which way to go along those rusty rails, he attempted to recall incidents in the various stories he had read which might help him in his present predicament. He could think of nothing, and finally concentrated on those innocent-looking rails. He had started out early that morning from Los Torros; the train, although a rickety affair, had made good time; he judged that Los Torros was probably over fifty miles distant. There had been no towns along the way, not even a house or cabin that he recalled. It would be foolish, then, to follow the rails back toward Los Torros. His only hope lay in going ahead. Painfully conscious of his swollen tongue and aching throat, he started on.

It was stiflingly hot. A yellow haze obscured the sun. A wind like the scorching breath from an open furnace whipped the yellow sand in swirling eddies across the flat floor of the desert. This grew steadily in intensity. Within a short time, the whirling spirals of sand had been replaced by a driving, blinding sandstorm. With arms flung across his smarting eyes, Shylock Kahoon plodded wearily on. Somehow, the hot wind had a numbing effect upon him. His thoughts grew listless and dull. He was conscious only of his terrible thirst. He scarcely felt the biting stab of the wind-driven sand. He moved like an automaton wound and set in motion. Those twin strips of rusty rail had long since been covered by the drifting sand; but Shylock Kahoon did not know this. His numb mind had long since relinquished all knowledge that there had ever been a railroad. His one desire, his every conscious thought was water.

In a way, the sandstorm turned out to be a blessing in disguise, in as much as it served to direct his stumbling steps in a straight line. Though scarcely aware of what he was doing, he, naturally enough, moved with the storm at his back. The wind came out of the east; so his steps pointed toward the west.

Some time later—just how much later Shylock Kahoon never knew—the storm ceased as abruptly as it had begun. The sun appeared—a huge ball of flaming red—in the saffron-colored sky. Once more, the breathless heat beat down. The man's head felt as though it would burst apart. Queer, wordless sounds came from his dry throat. His red-rimmed eyes were swollen almost shut. The yellow sand spun in erratic circles before him. The tips of his shoes assumed prodigious size.

Shylock Kahoon did not see the man on horseback. He did not know that they—the horse and the man—stood before him, until one of his outstretched, groping hands, held before him, as if he were feeling his way along an unfamiliar hallway, touched the horse. The animal snorted and backed away.

This definite touch of reality brought the exhausted Shylock out of his half daze. He jerked upright and peered at the horseman. He saw a thick-shouldered, evil-faced man, with stubble-covered cheeks the color of seasoned mahogany. Shylock tried to speak, but only mumbled inarticulately.

Slowly, the man got down off his horse. Shylock wondered, vaguely, why the stranger did not say something. He watched the man's face closely. Slowly the realization came to him that the horseman was also on the point of complete exhaustion. The man's lips were cracked and bleeding; his eyes were puffed and red. The horse stood with drooping head, legs sagging. With slow, uncertain fingers, the man unslung a water bag from his back.

Shylock thought that he had never seen a more desperate-looking individual than this man. Despite his agony of mind and body, the miser thought of robbers. This man looked like a bandit if ever a man did. He reached for the inner pocket where he kept his wallet, with some vague notion of attempting to hide it. His groping fingers came away clutching a single sheet of white paper. Otherwise, his pocket was empty. His wallet, his money, was gone! With gasping breath whistling through his dry throat, Shylock Kahoon glanced at that sheet of paper. It was the mortgage on the Diamond Bar Ranch which he had purchased from his brother. He looked up quickly to find the stranger holding the water bag toward him.

"Go easy," the man breathed in a husky, toneless voice. "Jest a drop——"

Shylock snatched at the water bag. But, at the last moment, the man pulled it away. He drew a red bandanna from his pocket, let a few drops of water trickle out of the bag onto a corner of this handkerchief, then forcibly pressed the moist cloth into Shylock's parched mouth.

In all his life, Shylock Kahoon had never tasted anything so deliciously satisfying as those few drops of warm, bitter water. When he had squeezed the last bit of wetness out of the handkerchief, the man moistened his own lips. Shylock's eyes never left that water bag. At that moment, he would willingly have exchanged his every dollar for one good drink of water. The stranger's face twisted into a grin. He shook his head.

"We're in a heck of a fix, stranger," he mumbled; "Romeo, here, is almost done fer, too. The rest o' the water in this here bag belongs to him."

The stranger swallowed with difficulty. He seemed to be pondering upon some troublesome matter. Finally, he spoke again in that husky, whispering voice. "The little hoss can get one of

us in," he said; "but not the two of us. You're a big man, an' I ain't so small."

Once more he paused, his face twisted into a scowl. "But you're wuss off than me, I guess," he finally said; "you're a tenderfoot. This is old stuff to me. An' so, you hop up on Romeo. Give him his head. He'll lead you right up to the front door of the Diamond Bar. I'll make it somehow, although I guess it wouldn't be no great loss ef Cass Ricker didn't make it."

Shylock could not quite make sense out of what Cass Ricker said. He allowed himself to be helped up on the horse's back, and, when the willing beast stumbled away he clung tightly to the reins, his sole thought being to keep his seat.

It was dusk when Cass Ricker's horse appeared at the Diamond Bar Ranch, bearing on its back a dust-covered, dazed rider who sprawled into the arms of several sympathetic young men who came running from the direction of the corral.

Shylock Kahoon's next conscious impression was to serve, for all time, as one of the pleasantest sensations of his life. When he opened his eyes, he found himself lying in a bed between cool, white sheets. A gray-haired woman with a kind face sat beside him. She was holding a sponge, pleasantly wet, to his mouth. A white-haired, stoop-shouldered man, stood in the doorway, watching with sympathetic eyes. So much Shylock Kahoon saw before he went back to sleep.

Shylock awoke late next morning, amazingly refreshed, and, curiously enough, feeling very little the worse for his painful adventure. As he struggled into his clothes, one thought was uppermost in his mind. He wondered if that man—Cass Ricker he had called himself—had made it? Shylock Kahoon—who knew himself better, certainly, than any one else knew him—marveled, briefly, at this altruistic thought. Not since he could remember had he devoted even a passing consideration to the welfare of any other man!

He made his way down the stairs and into the big ranch-house kitchen with this question on his tongue. He found the kind-faced woman busily engaged.

"Yes," she said, "Cass Ricker made it, all right." He had arrived late the night before. "He's a bad one, Cass is," the woman explained; "drinks too much. An' he's always a-fightin'. Can't seem to get along with nobody. But we've kept him on. He's got a good heart, Cass has, despite his mean face, and his drinkin' an' fightin' an' all——"

Although vaguely uncomfortable, due to the presence of that crinkling sheet of white paper in his inside pocket, Shylock Kahoon spent several very pleasant hours that day, talking with Silas Todd and Silas Todd's good wife.

"The Diamond Bar's a good ranch," Silas Todd said several times. "We've had a couple o' bad years; but things is lookin' up. O' course, there's a mortgage, which is held by a mean old rooster now," he added proudly, "an' mebbe, he—Buck—kin do somethin' about it."

"Buck?" Shylock questioned.

"Yeah, Buck Wedlow. Jest stuck up his shingle in Lowry City, Buck did. Him and Elsa is gonna be married," Silas Todd explained, looking sidewise at his wife.

Mrs. Todd nodded. "Yes," she said, "and I do wish you could met Elsa before you go. She's our only daughter, you know. An' she's such a good girl. She'll make Buck a fine wife."

Silas strongly echoed his wife's statements. "She sure is," he said, "she's a good girl, and she ain't had no easy time of it, neither. Money's been hard to get——"

Although Shylock Kahoon could not recall ever having really liked any human being, he found himself becoming

strangely impressed by the friendly kindliness of Silas and Mrs. Todd. Their unquestioning hospitality was something he could scarcely comprehend. Later in the day, he sought out Cass Ricker. The man was uglier looking than the day before, if possible. But he met Shylock with a grin.

"I should have told them about you last night," Shylock said. He had had no intention of offering an apology. The words seemed to come unbidden to his lips. "I forgot——"

Cass Ricker cut in unceremoniously. "Fergit it," he said, "you was all in. Didn't know whether you was comin' or goin'. Anyhow, I made it."

Shylock Kahoon swallowed hard. A sensation of warmth surged about his heart. He experienced an almost irresistible desire to take that ugly looking man's hand and shake it with all his strength. He did not do so, however.

That night after supper, Shylock sat staring out across the rolling green plain. Mr. and Mrs. Todd sat as silently at their guest's side.

"You know, folks," Shylock began, "I—I have no money. I lost it. Of course, I——"

"Who mentioned money," Silas Todd interrupted brusquely. "Money fer what?"

"For—for what you've done for me. The food—room—everything——"

Mr. and Mrs. Todd looked at each other as though doubting the evidence of their own ears.

"Why, mister, yore crazy," Silas Todd finally said. "Money? Why ——" But words failed the old man.

"It just wouldn't be possible for you to pay us a cent even if you was worth a million dollars," Mrs. Todd finished. "My laws, why, I'd never be able to look you in the face again, if we took money!"

Feeling uncomfortably red about the ears, Shylock Kahoon turned and walked away.

Three days later Shylock drove into Lowry City in a buckboard which had been unquestionably lent him by Silas Todd.

He visited a barber shop, then sought out Buck Wedlow. He found that young man sitting alone behind a shiny new desk in a little office over the hardware store. Shylock recognized Buck Wedlow instantly. Recognition was not quite so quick on Wedlow's part. It was not until Shylock began to speak that a light appeared in the young lawyer's eyes.

"You!" he exclaimed.

Shylock Kahoon fidgeted. "Yes," he said, "my name's Kahoon. You came into my place at Willet Corners just before Christmas last year, and—I kicked you out."

Buck Wedlow's jaws tightened. "I remember," he said. "I'll never forget."

For the life of him, Shylock Kahoon could not find words to say what he wanted to say. He fumbled in his pocket and produced the Diamond Bar mortgage. Without speaking, he pushed it toward Buck Wedlow.

The young lawyer merely glanced at it. "You!" he exclaimed again. "So you're the one, eh?"

Shylock Kahoon moistened his lips nervously. "Yes," he said, "I bought that mortgage off my brother."

"And I expect you're here to foreclose," Buck Wedlow sneered.

Shylock hesitated briefly. Then he shook his head. "No," he said, "no, I'm not going to foreclose on that mortgage—er—Buck. I'm going to tear it up."

"Twelve hundred dollars! That mortgage is worth twelve hundred dollars! And you're going to—tear it up? Why, man, do you realize what you're doing?" There was doubt in Buck Wedlow's voice.

Once again Shylock Kahoon nodded.

For some reason, he still could not find the words he wanted. "Yes," he said at last, "I'm going to tear it up. I've got plenty of money. Twelve hundred dollars—— Pooh! That is," he qualified, as his thoughts began to reach a semblance of order, "on one condition, I'll tear it up."

Buck Wedlow nodded and his dark face assumed an "I told you so" expression.

"On one condition," Shylock repeated, "and that is, that you and Elsa will live at the Diamond Bar Ranch with the old folks for a while after you're married. They think an awful lot of Elsa, Buck. They'll be terrible lonesome when she leaves them. You can build an addition to the ranch, or—build yourself a little bungalow near by. Just so you're close to the old folks—see what I mean? And if you're pinched for money," he went on hastily, "perhaps I can sort of tide you over. That's the condition," he concluded abruptly.

And, as Buck Wedlow seemed unable to speak, Shylock continued: "Of course, there is one other thing," he muttered, as though talking to himself; "but this is not a condition. It is just a sort of—favor. I like this country, Buck. I'm going to stay here for a long time. I like the mountains—there's gold in those hills—and I like the people. I'd like to stay out there at the ranch for a couple of months, if it could be arranged."

Buck Wedlow was still unable to speak. Finally, in response to the question in Shylock Kahoon's eyes, he nodded; then, still without speaking, he stretched his hand across the little desk. Shylock Kahoon gripped that lean brown hand strongly.

A NEW USE FOR FARM WASTE

A GREAT proportion of the wastebaskets of the city man are filled with paper, whereas the wastebasket of the farmer is apt to contain much bulkier things. Now there is to be a reversal of all this, thanks to a survey made by the ever-vigilant department of agriculture, and paper is to be manufactured from the waste of the farm.

These interesting facts are brought forward in connection with the appearance of the first book ever printed on cornstalk paper. The appropriate title of this volume was "Farm Products in Industry," and copies of it were presented to a group of chemists, publishers, and manufacturers at a luncheon given by the publisher.

The author of the volume, Doctor George M. Rommel, comments on the survey made under the auspices of the department of agriculture, which led him to the heart-warming conclusion that one billion five hundred million dollars a year can be added to the income of the American farmer by the development of processes for utilizing what have heretofore been considered farm wastes and marketing them.

Here is a book that should rapidly become a best seller in the agricultural districts.

The Yukon Drive

By Robert Ormond Case

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.

WITH only a girl's "Perhaps" to encourage him, Bill Rondo, buckaroo, undertakes to reach Dawson with one hundred steers on the hoof. His boss, the Scotchman McNab, stakes him to the cattle and signs a note for two thousand dollars advanced by Banker Bodine, father of Lila, the girl who said "perhaps."

Bodine grinds many an ax in this deal. He insists that Syd Lawson, another suitor of Lila, and son of Bodine's old friend Lawson of Wall Street, accompany Rondo; he plans with Hank Travis, McNab's rival rancher, to ruin the latter. Bodine is also Travis' banker; Travis has publicly rejected Rondo's proposal that he finance the scheme. Hoping that Lila will "make" high society in the East, Bodine detests Rondo. With complete understanding, Syd and Bodine drink "To the beef that must never reach Dawson!"

CHAPTER VII.

A PESSIMISTIC WRANGLER.

UNTIL a late hour that night Rondo and McNab were closeted in the latter's office in the south wing of the rambling ranch house. In the conference, which was in the nature of a council of chiefs before a campaign, Rondo gained a new and respectful impression of his gaunt employer, a closer insight into his depth of character, his breadth of vision, his odd mixture of native cautiousness and daring.

Rondo was aware, too, of McNab's change of manner toward him. It was no longer that of employer and employee, but in some subtle way suggested that he, Rondo, in a matter of hours, had passed a dividing line in his career. He was now a dreamer of dreams, a person of responsibilities, a man of affairs. It was a thrilling and sobering realization, typical of the changed attitude of the world about him; and inwardly he resolved to do his

utmost to measure up to this new appraisal.

Sobering, too, was the realization of the extent to which McNab was backing the venture.

"Boss," Rondo protested at this point, "you mean to say that if I was to lose the steers, and in the same jack pot was to pass out myself, you'd not only be out three thousand dollars' worth of beef, but also the note to Bodine? It ain't right. You got no call to take a chance on busting yoreself up in business. We'll make other arrangements."

"No, laddie," said McNab, his grave eyes twinkling, "it would not exactly bust me up in business, as you put it, even if the project failed. I would still have some resources left. I could stand the loss. Throughout my life I have refrained from taking chances. I am entitled to indulge my weakness this once. Let us consider that phase of the matter closed."

For the most part, the conference resolved itself into a discussion of generalities, with McNab talking in his grave, judicious manner and Rondo listening. The older man drew upon his own experience and native shrewdness to point out sound methods of procedure, and Rondo absorbed this advice with a growing and somewhat appalling realization not only of the dimensions of the venture, but of how meager was the data upon which he could predicate its success.

McNab's suggestions referred only to matters in their larger scope. Specific details and specific performance, he made it plain, were entirely up to Rondo. There was, for example, the matter of the personnel of the expedition. It was agreed that four men would be sufficient to handle the herd over the roughest terrain; Rondo, and three trusted lieutenants. There might also be a camp tender and general roustabout. But as to the selection of these men, McNab would make no suggestion.

"You will be handling these boys, Rondo," he pointed out. "One of the many things upon which your success depends will be how cheerfully and efficiently they will carry out your commands. For three months, or more, day and night, you will be associated in a hostile wilderness. You must be the sole judge of their qualifications."

"They've got to be good," agreed Rondo, "me bein' handicapped right at the start with this feller Lawson. The two others will have to be bear cats."

"Lawson is an unknown quantity," said McNab, nodding. "But I have no doubt you will be able to make something out of him. If there is iron in him, you must bend him to your will. If not, you must train him at least to obey orders. Once you start overland in Alaska, he will be dependent entirely upon you."

It was after midnight when Rondo left McNab's office. As he strode toward the bunk house through the darkness, he shivered a little. But it was not only the crispness of late spring in the air; it was a tremor akin to apprehension that shook him. He had crossed a dividing line in his career and now stood, in his relation to the world, in a kind of intermediate territory in which he would be weighed in the balance. The prominence he had achieved in the public eye during the past crowded hours was not built upon past accomplishments but upon the daring of the thing he proposed to do. Men gave him credit for his vision, but even the most tolerant and optimistic would hold secret reservations against that moment when he should succeed. Even Lila had said only "Perhaps."

If he failed, his future would be mortgaged; but his failure would also mark him as a man apart through ensuing years, an impractical visionary to be viewed with sardonic pity. But if

he succeeded—— He closed his mind upon the thought. He must succeed. Greater stakes were involved than monetary reward or loss, the McNab beef, or the Bodine note; yes, greater stakes than Lila's favor! He was wagering his own self-confidence and self-respect.

The crew were waiting in the bunk house. They met him with profane and caustic comment, heaped maledictions upon him for revealing the details of his intended expedition abroad rather than within four walls of the McNab ranch. With an injured air they told of their chagrin at having learned from other lips of his proposed assault on the North; and beneath their accusing manner, it was obvious, was a burning eagerness.

Looking about the circle, studying the bronzed, reckless, familiar faces, Rondo knew that each member of the crew would willingly mortgage his soul for a chance to join the expedition. The knowledge brought with it a new surge of self-confidence, a strange, inward thrill. These men, above all others in the high country, knew him best. They knew what potentialities he possessed, what equipment that made for dominance; they knew his weaknesses. Yet they were more than willing to join forces with him.

They scornfully brushed aside any remote suggestion that Rondo would select the assistants he needed for the drive from any other group than those present. Why look elsewhere, when the acknowledged cream of the top hands of the cattle country was among those present? Rondo nodded agreement. He had already mentally reached this decision. They were good men, each and all. There were other good men in the valley of the Crooked River, but these he knew thoroughly, even as they knew him.

Their faces fell when he informed them that he would select only one from their number. He told them of the deal with Banker Bodine whereby Lawson would be an enforced member of the expedition. In addition to himself and Lawson there would only be two more, and one of these would be selected from the crew.

"This fourth lad," Rondo explained, "has got to be a gent with special and particular equipment. All along the line, we're going to find ourselves in the midst of jack pots that are new to us. Lawson's a tenderfoot, but he's an educated feller and maybe in some showdown or other he'll hold the winnin' hand. I understand cows. I hope to make out in whatever jack pot involves the critters. The lad whom I select from amongst you boys will likewise understand cows and will know how to take orders, and I'll know how he'll pan out in any show-down. But this fourth feller, in addition to understandin' beef, has got to have some special knowledge which will be useful. What that knowledge is, and who the gent is, I don't know yet."

The crew pounced upon the sole fact that one of their number would be selected. They gathered around Rondo in a grinning but tense circle, cigarettes hanging motionless from reckless lips. Only "Slim," a gaunt, towering person with features and spirit cast in pessimistic mold, remained seated, elbows resting on bony knees.

Somewhat quizzically, but with blue eyes intent, Rondo looked past the group at Slim. Debonair and reckless ones were on their feet, rocking on their heels with suppressed excitement, each confident deep within him that he alone could measure up to the specifications required. But Slim, the lionlike of heart, of rawhide muscle, whose doglike devotion to Rondo was a matter of current knowledge in the high desert, sat a little apart.

In his heart, Rondo had already made his decision. He knew the man he wanted. But he also knew human

nature. In the one he sought, a willingness to obey orders was vital, as was the physique to endure hardships, and a temperament to withstand adversity. Raw courage and stubborn determination were prerequisites. But these qualifications were not all. The one selected for his right-hand man must be fired with a burning enthusiasm that would surmount all obstacles, a zeal and loyalty that would brook no compromise or defeat.

Thus it was not for the purpose of plunging Slim deeper into his bog of self-deprecatory gloom that Rondo grinned upon the gaunt one and spoke lightly.

"Slim, me lad," he questioned, "how come you ain't trompin' on the heels of these lobos? Why ain't you in the front rank throwin' out your chest and tellin' the world you're the precise gent made to order for this particular business. Eh, cowboy?"

"No use," said the gloomy one. "It ain't in the cards. It's just another one of them things."

"What things, Slim?"

"Which you hanker for an' when you reach out to lay holt on it, it's gone. Expecting nothin' that a way, I don't get disappointed."

"What ails you mostly, cowboy?" questioned Rondo, his gaze roving covertly about the grinning faces of the crew. "In that last two-three years we been ridin' together, I've taken note of the fact that when they was grief in prospect you was right there, squared away, an' all set for more than yore share. When they's wild cats to slaughter, you wade amongst 'em, hip deep. But when they's wild flowers to pick, or honey to gouge into, or gravy in which to wade, you set back gloomy an' remorseful and leave the fancy trimmings to other enterprisin' lads. How come, old hoss?"

"Gravy is for other folks"—Slim achieved a lugubrious grin—"it ain't for me. Grief's the fodder to which I'm accustomed. It's a lesson I learnt."

"Yeah? Tell us about it, Slim."

"When I was a little shaver, about knee-high to a ginpole," said the gaunt one, hanging his head, " my maw made me a cake about the size of an overstuffed doughnut to take to school. We was poor folks, you understand, down in Arkansas. All me an' the other young uns ever took in our lunch buckets was corn bread an' sow-belly. But maw had scraped up a handful of white flour an' a little of this an' that an' fetched forth this cake which I didn't think no more of than my right eye.

"Bein' built like a ganglin' angleworm that a way, mostly stummick, I figgered I had the world by the tail on a downhill drag as I waltzed off to school that mornin'. I fetched this cake out to give it the once-over as I trailed through the swamp, just to tantalize myself an' figger how the eyes of them other ga'nt young uns would stick out a foot when lunch time came.

"Well, sir, they was a hungry-lookin' slab-sided hound was follerin' me through the swamp. When I slipped an' fell on some blasted vine underfoot, that said cake bounced out of my hand. When I leapt to my feet an' looked for it, the maverick was gone. But the slinkin', Siberian, pestiferous hound was lickin' his chops an' lookin' me over hopeful, as much as to say, 'Try that again, mister. This here's a gold mine.' "

The gaunt one sighed. "It was the first cake I'd ever seen, you understand. No bigger than an overstuffed doughnut. I snatched up a club an' chased that blasted hound clean through the swamp. I reckon the mangy critter figgered grim death was at his heels. He flew. When I run home, bawling, my paw licked me for playin' hooky from school. When I leaned, blubberin', against maw an' told her how

come, she says, 'Leave that be a lesson to you, son. Cake ain't for you.'

"It's a lesson I shorely remembered. It's follered me the rest of my life, just like that blasted Siberian wolfhound was standin' at my side. So I'm settin' back an' leavin' these other optimists look this said cake over if they feel that a way. I'll leave it lay."

"But you'd like to go?" questioned Rondo softly. "There's nothin' holdin' you, except you're that backward an' remorseful?"

"Would I like to go?" echoed Slim. "You hadn't ought to tear me in two with such a question, boss!"

"Gents," Rondo addressed the crew, "since I've done pried it out of Slim that he also is rarin' to go, it's unanimous. With this aggregation of uncurried wolves to choose from, I'm sittin' pretty. But I ain't goin' to name the noble lobo to-night. I got to sleep on it an' will pick the gent in the mornin'. Let's hit the hay, cowboys. To-morrow's the day we'll be busy as beavers, cuttin' out the beef an' getting the outfit in shape to travel."

The crew turned away, masking their impatience. Their hoarse and guarded conversation muttered on in the darkness long after the oil lamp had been extinguished. Only the gaunt Slim lay on his bunk in silence, head resting on his great hands, staring unseeingly up at the smoke-blackened rafters.

Rondo's sleep was not easy that night. In dreams he threatened with the bellowing herd through iron peaks; moved, quaking, among savage dimensions where avalanches roared; crept insectlike across the face of mighty glaciers, and forded turbulent rivers. This hostile and nightmare environment reduced his herd one by one and later by twos and scores. At last, in the rapids of the mighty Yukon, all but one of the remnant of his hundred steers was lost. This lone animal swam on, down river. But within sight of Dawson, its horns and dripping muzzle sank from view.

Long after the snores of the crew echoed hollowly through the gloom, Rondo wrestled with his disordered fancies, muttering. It was not that a premonition of disaster was visiting itself upon him, the foreboding shadow of coming events. But for the first time in his youthful life he felt the burden of new responsibilities, the weight of larger affairs.

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTNERS ON A LONG TRAIL.

HE awoke with the dawn. It was Sunday, and it was the crew's prerogative to sleep late. But Rondo was eager to be about the business of assembling his outfit. Much must be done on this day, for on the morrow the herd would start North. At the thought, sleep fell from him. He leaped from his bunk, drew on his clothes, and tiptoed softly toward the door, boots in hand.

As he stepped out upon the bunk house veranda he was somewhat startled to observe a stranger seated nonchalantly on the step, leaning against a post.

"Howdy," said Rondo, blinking. As he seated himself on the bench and drew on his boots, he eyed the other intenely.

He was a dusty and leather-hued oldtimer, gnarled of hand and seamed of countenance, with a ragged mustache drooping across a pugnacious jaw. His cheek bulged with an enormous quid of tobacco, and there was a humorous quirk at the corners of his piercing, somewhat quizzical eyes. He was a man of about fifty years, Rondo judged. His dress was that of a cattleman. A ragged sombrero was pushed back from his corrugated forehead, revealing short-cropped, grizzled hair.

"Howdy," responded the stranger,

yawning. "What kind of a dude ranch is this, bub? Daylight, by gravy, an' you're the first sign of life about the premises!"

Rondo stretched and ran his fingers throught his tousled hair. He produced the makings, rolled a cigarette, and grinned upon the other.

"If we'd known you was here, we'd all have been up an' standin' at attention," he averred. "Sneakin' in so early this a way, you kind of took us by surprise."

"Been travelin' all night to get here," said the other. "Dang' near rode my critter into the ground. I reckon yore boss is still snorin', huh? He's the hombre with whom I crave to make talk."

"You're talkin' to him." Rondo lighted the cigarette and tossed the match away. "What's on your mind?"

The other stared, his grizzled brows lowering. "I'm referrin' to Bill Rondo," he growled, "foreman of this layout. You the gent?"

"Himself," said the youth cheerfully, "in person."

"Well, I'm danged!" quoted the other. "You mean to say a rosy-cheeked yearlin' like you is bossin' this hard-boiled outfit, and is the gent who's aimin' to drive some beef into the Yukon?"

Rondo flushed a little beneath his questioner's searching gaze.

"That's me," he said briefly. "What of it?"

"No offense," said the other hastily. "From yore reputation, I figgered you was a different brand of wolf. I'm from the Lazy Z, southwest of Mitchell," he explained. "The boys call me 'Kansas.' When I heard about this Yukon business I didn't stop for nothin'. It was after midnight. I saddled my critter an' been travelin' ever since."

"Which you shorely have," Rondo agreed. The Lazy Z was some forty miles from the point where they sat. "Now, how in blazes did that yarn get so far since last night? An' how come you burned up the dust this a way, old-timer?"

"One of the lads was at Halfway when the Wells Fargo feller come through from Prineville," said the other, chuckling. "When this wrangler of ours was tellin' the lads all about yore idea in the bunk house, I set back, listenin'. It didn't take no inner voice to tell me the hour had struck, an' I'm likewise old enough to know that only the early birds has a chance at the gravy. So I sneaked out, saddled my critter, an' was on my way."

"Yeah?" said Rondo guardedly. "An' just what did you have in mind, mister?"

"I'll tell you," said Kansas. Though his cheek was already bulging, he tore off another chew. Rondo saw that his gnarled hand was trembling. "I'm old, but I ain't so rickety as I might look. I've been around a little in my time, here an' there an' yonder. I'm a dang' good camp tender an' roustabout an' I can wrangle cattle. I—I got a lot of information I've picked up on this an' that, knockin' around that a way—prospectin' an' trappin'. I can blacksmith some, an' carpenter, an' I'm a fair-to-middlin' cook. I can handle shootin' irons, an' brandin' irons, an' skittles——" He drew forth a huge bandanna and wiped his face. "Son of a gun," he said frankly, with a grin, "I had a copper-riveted selling talk all figgered out. Memorized it whilst I was ridin' over. But the maverick's done sneaked out on me when I get down to brass tacks this a way."

"'S all right," Rondo soothed, his blue eyes twinkling. "Never mind the trimmin's. You crave to go alone, is that it?"

"Like a thirsty gent in the desert craves sparklin' water," said Kansas. "Like a sinner craves salvation."

Rondo studied the other, puffing on his cigarette. He felt drawn to him by the very intensity of his eagerness. There could be no doubt of his sincerity. It was obvious that this hard-bitten old-timer, product of lurid years on the frontier, had responded to the first news of the expedition as an aged cavalry horse reacts to the far-off notes of a bugle. He had ridden through the night in response to a rumor. He had been waiting on the step at dawn. He was waiting now, his glittering eyes, beneath lowered brows, almost pathetically intent upon the youth's face.

"Well, now, old hoss," Rondo evaded, "you understand I'll be travelin' light. And short-handed. There'll only be four of us. I've already picked two. How come you want to trail along, Kansas?"

"I'll tell you," said Kansas. He spoke slowly at first, but later, as inhibitions fell from him, his words crowded upon each other. "It's my last chance to get in on the greatest gold stampede on earth. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool prospector, an' once a feller's tasted that meat there's no other fodder will hold him long. For the last twenty years I've wrangled cattle, an' roustabouted, an' fell timber, an' built barns, just to make a stake. They was just 'between' jobs, an' after that I'd hit for the mountains.

"I'm fifty-six years old." He made the statement almost as a challenge. "I ain't lyin' to you, son. I'm gettin' along, but I'm still hard as nails an' can out-work most young fellers when it gets down to brass tacks. When this Klondike business busted loose last fall I felt like bawlin'. I knew what those fellows would be up against tryin' to make it in from Dyea over Chilkoot. I've been in Alasky. I know them mountains an' what the winters is like on the Yukon. I'd have made a stab at it anyway, except I didn't have money enough for a big outfit. I still ain't got enough for a year's supplies in the inside. But if I don't get in this summer, I'll never make it. Too old that a way. If I could get in, I'd never come back, 'less I struck it rich. I got no folks—nothin' to hold me, an' the biggest stampede of them all is roarin' on without me. Everything I hear about it, day by day, dang' near tears me in two.

"Leave me go with you, Rondo. You'll shorely never regret it. I'll help you haze them steers to Dawson. I'll stand by you, an' fight for you, work an' starve. There won't be no trails too long or jack pots too severe. When the last of you has fell from the saddle, I'll still be there, clingin' with my teeth if necessary. I'll stick to the finish. I don't want no pay, no nothin'—just the privilege of trailin' along. An' after the beef is delivered and you've shook me by the hand an' said, 'Kansas, you helped fetch them in'—then I'll see the Klondike."

He paused, breathing heavily. His gnarled hands were clenched; his leathery features glistened.

Rondo knew that here was drama. He had seen hunger in men's eyes, and thirst, passion, greed, and fear. He had never seen such a burning flame of eagerness as this. It was akin to the savage champing of a thoroughbred held in curb while his fellows thunder forth from the barrier; like the pensioned fire-horse chained in his stall when the alarm is sounded. Kansas had followed other stampedes in his youth and prime. The call of the Klondike, greatest of them all, had found him chained by indigence and age; but it was as though his very soul vibrated to an ancient, primitive chord.

"Listen," said Rondo, caught up by the other's fervor, "somethin' you said stuck out like a sore thum. You've been in Alaska? On the Yukon?"

"Clean up to Fort Selkirk. An' up the White River a ways, an' the Tenino.

Come in from the Mackenzie an' went out by St. Michaels."

"Fort Selkirk," said Rondo. "Is that below Dawson?"

"Above," said Kansas. "They was no Dawson then. Drifted right by Klondike River." He grinned with no trace of regret, according to the prospector's creed. "It didn't look good to me. An' they was maybe a couple hundred million there."

"H'm." Rondo studied him speculatively. "But you've never been into the Yukon from this side, eh? Don't know anythin' about the trails?"

"From the coast?" The other shook his head. "But I can picture Chilkoot an' the White Pass. I know them Alasky mountains. They're all the same, except they get worse. I've met up with trappers who've went in by Bennett an' La Barge an' the Lewes River, or Upper Yukon. Them mushers is goin' in that a way now. It's shorely a tough trail."

"Kansas," said Rondo, "you've been in Alaska. You've also wrangled cattle. Do you figger I'll get in to Dawson with my hundred steers?"

"I'll answer that plain an' blunt," said Kansas. "When I heard of the deal last night, an' knowin' yore reputation, I figgered you had a chance. Which was why I made tracks here pronto. When I first met up with you just now, I wasn't so sure, you're that rosy-cheeked an' soft-spoken. But now that I've talked to you, I'm sold on it thorough. You're a blushin' maverick who's hand might hold only a pair of lowly deuces, but yore eyes says it's a straight flush. You ain't so small as you looked at first. Folks don't pick up yore reputation in these parts 'less they've got iron in 'em. So I say you got a chance—providin'——" his hard-bitten features writhed into a rare and engaging grin—"you take me along."

Rondo did not make immediate reply. He felt drawn to this hard-featured, tobacco-chewing, truculent old-timer, who yearned only to reach that material Valhalla of placer miner's dreams that was called the Klondike. It was from a strong cup that these prospectors drank; the thirst it bred was consuming. It was not the finding of gold itself that held them enchained, but rather the search—the long trails, the exploration, the roaring camps. For this breed, no trail was too long, no terrain too rough, no storms too severe. Kansas was old. The great stampede had caught him unprepared. This was his sole chance to reach the Yukon again. Should he reach Dawson, Rondo knew, he would die happy, though claims on Eldorado and Bonanza had all been staked and no gold ever shone dully in the bottom of his pan.

Rondo was a student of men, though he himself did not know it, nor had he analyzed it. He only knew that he liked certain men on sight and disliked others; and subsequent events usually bore out this instant appraisal. He felt that he knew Kansas thoroughly, though he had never, before that morning, laid eyes on him. There was nothing obscure or deep about the man. He was blunt, profane, hard-bitten; a rugged type for whom a spade was invariably a spade. He was accustomed to quick decisions, as witnessed by his presence on the step on the McNab bunk house before sunup in response to a chuckling story brought over the intervening miles from Prineville. He had spent his life on the frontier, and his primitive accomplishments were many.

Counterbalancing the fact that he was old in years and might become a burden on the trail, despite his own rugged self-confidence, was the even more significant fact that he had been in Alaska. He was one of the few adventurers who had penetrated the interior prior to the discovery of gold

on Klondike River. To him the North was not an unknown, mysterious realm, ice-bound, sinister, and aloof. He had not covered the territory that the drive would cover, but he had seen Alaskan peaks and roaring streams and had drifted on the current of the mighty Yukon.

Rondo debated these things, his speculative gaze on Kansas. Sensing that he was being tried in the balance, the old-timer sat rigid, his jaw clamped on an enormous chew. Upon this scene the door of the bunk house opened, and Slim shambled forth, yawning.

"Just waked up an' seen yore bunk empty, boss," the towering one apologized, rubbing his eyes. "Figgered to roll out when you did, an' give you a hand. What's this?" he demanded, his gaze fixing on Kansas. A slow grin wrinkled his lugubrious features. "I'm danged if here ain't the ol' busted-down wolf of the Lazy Z. The rickety roustabout himself. How's tricks, ol' hoss?"

"You ganglin' image," Kansas retorted, with an answering grin. "This expedition's plumb ruined. I figgered to sneak in here an' transact a little heavy business without meetin' up with no overgrown half-portions split clean up to the chin that a way. They haunt me. You still walkin' bow-legged on account of supportin' so much ivory above the ears, cowboy?"

"Personalities," said Slim, lowering himself to the step and producing the makings, "is something you ain't equipped to deal in, bein' under too much of a handicap. How'd you get here so early, Kansas? Or did you bed down here last night—out in the corral with the other live stock?"

"Slim," Rondo cut in, eying the pair closely. "You know this gent, huh?"

"Sure I know him," Slim nodded, and blew a careless cloud of smoke upward. "I ain't boastin' about it, boss. I used to circulate south of Mitchell, where this toothless wolverene was one of them neighborhood pests. I ain't seen him for quite a spell. Figgered prob'ly this said senile decay had done sneaked up on him. How come you held out this long, Kansas?"

"Now listen, big boy," said Kansas, the grin fading from his face. "Rondo here's liable to figger they's some wheat in all this chaff, which would be some embarrassin'. I ain't toothless. An' if you figger I'm busted down I'll be happy to fetch you down to average size by tying a couple of fancy knots in yore noble frame. Ponder them sentiments, Slim, me lad."

Slim stared at the belligerent old-timer, then cast a sidelong, questioning glance at Rondo. Sensing something significant in the air, he hastened to make amends.

"Now, now, old hoss," he soothed, "smooth down them bristles. I wasn't aimin' to scatter yore hand. The boss knows I was only joshin' about the shape you're in."

"Slim," said Rondo bluntly, jerking a thumb at Kansas, "how does he stack up?"

"High an' wide," said Slim. "I mean it, boss. He casts a shadow."

"For instance," said Rondo, his eyes fixed upon the gloomy one, "he's been in Alaska. He can wrangle cattle. He claims to be an A-1 camp tender. He craves to see the Klondike. Why wouldn't he make a fair-to-middlin' hand for this drive?"

This was indeed a test of Slim's stamina of soul. He knew, as Rondo knew, that the latter's choice of assistants had not yet been announced. Inwardly, Rondo writhed in sympathy for the other's torture, but his blue eyes did not waver in their ruthless appraisal.

It was not human for the gaunt cowboy to reply with instant enthusiasm. Yet it was only briefly that he hesitated. His features settled again into the lugubrious lines of one who, having as-

sured himself fervently that he has expected nothing, yet steels himself against the coming shadow of bitter disappointment.

"O. K." he said, nodding; and added: "He's made to order."

"Well, Slim," said Rondo softly, "rise up on yore hind legs and shake hands with the other gent who'll trail with us to the Yukon."

Kansas leaped to his feet, stiffness and age forgotten. But Slim sat as though stunned. He turned his head to look at Rondo.

"Us?" he repeated, hoarsely. "What you mean, boss?"

"I mean," said Rondo, "that the gents who'll haze them steers to Dawson will be Lawson, an' you, an' me, an' Kansas."

Slim arose then, lean joint by joint. His eyes, in their bony sockets, revealed the dawning wonder of one who sees dreams come true and still only half believes. In silence he and Kansas gripped hands. Beaming, Rondo, too, arose, and stood, thumbs hooked in his belt.

"Slim, me lad," said Kansas, with such a vast and exultant grin that his very ears quivered, "we're glory bound."

"Correct," agreed Slim. "Boss, much obliged."

It was a dramatic and significant moment. All about them the vast ranch slumbered. As the trio stood eye to eye in the strengthening dawn, it was as though they reaffirmed a silent plot. Here, at this hour and from this spot, began a long trail.

"Let's go," said Rondo in a voice that he strove to make matter-of-fact. "Slim, dig up the axle grease. You'll have time to get the chuck wagon in shape before breakfast. Where's the 'whang' leather? I got to throw a couple stitches in my saddle. You, Kansas, as soon as you get some victuals under yore belt, had best slope back to the Lazy Z an' get yore outfit. We're startin' in the mornin', an' it'll take you the best of that time to get back."

"Don't have to go back to the Lazy Z," said Kansas, with a somewhat sheepish grin. "My blanket roll an' carbine is over by the water trough. Drew my time last night, an' fetched the rest of my worldly goods with me. It didn't overload my critter none."

"Son of a gun!" said Rondo wonderingly. "You're a gambler, old son. How come you was so certain for sure I'd put you on the pay roll?"

"I wasn't," Kansas chuckled. "But I sure aimed to give you a song an' dance. It's surprisin' how eloquent a gent can get with his back to the wall."

"Check," Rondo agreed. "Well, Kansas, grain yore critter an' trail with Slim. When the gong sounds, get set to eat hearty. All right, caballeros, on yore way."

The pair strode away, Kansas all but trotting beside the towering Slim. They heaped maledictions upon each other, as was their custom; bandied jeering witticism and caustic comment. Slim's bellowing laughter resounded and Kansas' cackling chuckle.

Looking after them, Rondo felt strengthened, encouraged. Even as McNab had said, Lawson was an unknown quantity. But these men were of a type he knew thoroughly. Their ways were his ways, their creed his creed. A great forward step had been taken. New forces of courage and loyalty were arrayed with him.

CHAPTER IX.

LAST HOURS.

THROUGHOUT the day the assembling of the outfit went forward under the supervision of Rondo and McNab. Saddle and pack strings were selected, equipment renovated, the chuck wagon drawn up and provisioned

for the drive to The Dalles, whence the herd would be shipped by rail to Seattle; and by nightfall one hundred steers, cut out one by one from the vast McNab herds, munched uneasily at the feed racks within the palings of a stout corral.

Typical of the caliber of the McNab buckaroos was the manner in which each hid his inner and bitter disappointment at not being selected for the drive to the North. They accepted the fact philosophically, slapped Slim and Kansas on the back in sincere congratulation, and plunged into the work of preparation with enthusiasm.

At the feed lot, under Rondo's direction and with McNab nodding silently in the background, each of the saddle string was selected with an eye to such qualities as stamina, endurance, ruggedness, and courage rather than speed or appearance. This meant upland range horses, rangy of proportion, and rawhide of muscle. Kansas' paint passed inspection, as did Slim's beloved calico; which caused these hard-bitten ones to beam complacently, though there was, in truth, more than a little diplomacy and knowledge of human nature in the decision on the part of Rondo and McNab. In some future crisis, should the hard-bitten ones fail, they could present no alibi if mounted on their own pals of horseflesh in whom they had implicit confidence. They would present no excuse in any event, according to the code of the buckaroo; but always, if mounted on animals other than their own, they would hold a secret reservation as to where the blame lay.

Rondo hesitated briefly over his own splendid buckskin. That savage range king was unquestionably equipped for the work at hand; but he was one of Rondo's few treasures. Despite his confidence and inner determination to extract the last shred of advantage from whatever hostile circumstances lay ahead, Rondo had a premonition that sacrifices of horseflesh and perhaps of men would line their trail. Men hurled themselves forth into a harsh environment of their own free will and their rewards were ample according to their lights; beef was merely food to be delivered on the hoof; but why should the schemes of men or Fate decree that such an animal as this, of pride and intelligence and pagan beauty, should know weary miles, toil uncomplainingly and perhaps die in some desolate Northern waste far from the blistering plain and rugged pinnacle of his own familiar range?

Yet Rondo's hesitation was only momentary. He was aghast at the implied lack of confidence that had caused him to hesitate. If given a choice, he told himself, the proud buckskin would never permit another lesser animal to take his place; he, too, was the dominant breed.

Thus his beautiful mount headed the saddle and pack string that were segregated, snorting, from their fellows. These animals were newly shod at the blacksmith shop and led to the stable. Equal care was given to the selection and inspection of equipment. Worn parts in saddles and pack saddles were replaced with new. "Tackroom" and commissary were drawn upon for essentials and extras in leather paraphernalia. Blankets and ponchos were spread and examined. Lists were made of the necessary personal equipment each man should take, and a weight limit established for extras. Tentative lists were drawn up of items to be purchased in Seattle, such as tarpaulins, waterproof duffel bags and the like. In these latter conferences pertaining to equipment suitable for the North, Kansas' knowledge was drawn upon.

Proof of the manner in which the expedition had intrigued the popular fancy in the Crooked River Valley was the number of riders who drifted in

during the day to watch preparations and add sage advice. Many were youthful citizens eager to accompany Rondo to the North. These were somewhat complacently informed by Kansas and Slim that the lists were closed, and the crestfallen but grinning youths trailed the lucky ones in droves as they stalked about their various activities. Groups stood at the door of the blacksmith shop, watching the horseshoeing intenly as though this routine craftsmanship, with which they were familiar since childhood, here revealed new and significant characteristics. A cowhand repairing a saddle found a circle of spectators about him, gravely studying his every move. Men leaned against the corral fence, perched, buzzardlike, along the topmost rail, or lolled about the chuck wagon, in genial controversy concerning the merits and alleged chances of the venture.

A large gallery watched the selection of the hundred steers. Rondo and McNab rode among the herd, designating each animal, and these were hazed into the cutting-out pen. Here the same care was exercised as with the horseflesh. The McNab beef were all in good flesh and of fair breeding, the dour Scot having been one of the first in the region to import blooded sires for the upbuilding of the herd. Yet there were considerable variations in type, and from these selections were made with an eye to their ability to negotiate the roughest of trails. The wild and less tractable were passed by, the long-horns, the heavy of foot, and the natural "stampeders." The shaggy of coat, indicative of rugged upland strains, the rangy and "long-geared" were designated one by one. And finally, the last of the hundred was hazed into the pen, where they milled, broad heads tossing, eyes rolling uneasily toward the circle of spectators against the sky.

By nightfall all preparations were complete. After genial farewells and facetious advice that masked emotions of envy and deference on the part of the younger element and a species of sardonic pessimism from the older men, the curious ones took their departure. The chuck wagon had been drawn up, provisioned and waiting. Equipment to be shipped North with the steers, includng blanket rolls, saddlebags, packsaddles and duffel-bags, had been stacked in the tack wagon. The saddle and pack strings, and harness horses for the drive to The Dalles, were in the stable. The steers munched and muttered in the corral. When the supper gong rang from the cookhouse, everything was in readiness for the start at dawn.

Supper that night at the McNab cookshack was in the nature of an event. There was nothing unusual about the meal, nor the environment. The smoke-blackened walls were the same. The lamp on the wall shone on the oilcloth-covered table, familiar food, familiar faces. It was not because Kansas, a stranger, was present; he was, in fact, through the close association of the day, no longer a stranger. Nor was it because McNab, contrary to his usual custom when at the home ranch, was eating at the table with his men. His presence merely added significance to the moment.

But it was as though a realization had come to all, now that preparations for the venture were complete, that this was the last evening when all those present would sit and eat together. Months in time and stirring experience would intervene before they again foregathered. Perhaps, according to the workings of an inscrutable fate, Rondo's boyish and self-deprecatory personality and Slim's gaunt and lugubrious figure would never again appear at the McNab table at the close of day.

Nothing open or tangible pointed to the significance of the moment. It was

felt rather than expressed. Rondo sat at his accustomed place. Slim was at his right, Kansas at his left. To right and left and opposite across the table the chuckling crew sat shoulder to shoulder. Yet Rondo and his lieutenants were as men apart. It was as though some subtle bond joining them, also separated them from the rest. These three had responded to a far call; they were adventure bound. As they sat together now, so through the unknown future that began on the morrow would they travel the same trail, squat together around the same wavering fire, eat, stand guard and labor together.

McNab, at the head of the table, said little during the meal. But again and again as genial debate and chuckling witticism raged about him, more boisterous than usual to cover an inner sense of constraint, his gaze rested on Rondo and Slim with a species of covert envy and gloomy pride. These young men, the one leading, the other following, would blaze far trails such as he, McNab, might never follow. He was supplying the cash; they would supply the courage and the brawn. By backing the venture he had made the contract possible, but theirs would be the stirring performance or magnificent attempt. They were here at the moment. To-morrow they would be gone; good men both, their places would be hard to fill.

When the meal was done and the chuckling crew shambled forth through the gloom, harness creaking, toward the bunk house, McNab walked with Rondo a little apart.

"You have done well, laddie," he observed. "Everything is in readiness, eh?"

"All set," said Rondo. The flaring match shone on his rugged, boyish features as he lighted his cigarette.

"How will you proceed to-morrow?"

"Start the herd at sunup," said Rondo, "the chuck wagon, tack wagon, an' saddle string bringin' up the rear. Bein' all prime steers we'll make 'em roll along. I figger a week to The Dalles. To-morrow's Monday. They'd ought to be on the cars an' rollin' toward Seattle a week from to-night. An' that's another thing, boss. We'll have plenty hands as far as The Dalles, with the boys you're loanin' us to fetch back the wagons. Me an' Slim can tend the cattle and saddle string on the trail. So Kansas had best start out to-morrow and go direct to Seattle. He can beat us there by three-four days an' hang around the docks and amongst the stampeders and get all the dope he can on the North. That old-timer's been around considerable. He talks the same language as those fellers. I've got a hunch he can pick up a lot of valuable information which we'll shorely need."

"An excellent idea," McNab approved, after a moment's thought. "And at the same time, he can make tentative arrangements for transportation North. I suspect the first real difficulty you will encounter will be in getting away from Seattle."

"Yeah, but the biggest gamble of all is where do we go after we've landed in Alaska," said Rondo, almost in awe. "They's five hundred miles between Skagway an' Dawson. That's what I want Kansas to get some ideas on. They must be some kind of overland trail that swings around the White Pass. It'll be tough sleddin' if we got to do our explorin' as we go along, an' a hundred steers on our hands which have got to have grass. Gosh, boss ——" his cigarette glowed at a sudden intake of breath. "Only you an' me have analyzed this business an' know the odds against us. If we can get the steers shipped North, we got a chance if we can find a trail, providin' they's grass!"

"The grass is the thing," McNab agreed. "I am confident that you will

find a trail. It may take all summer, but if you can keep the steers in good flesh, I don't believe there is a mountain range in Alaska that you cannot cross. You must have adequate supplies, of course. Which suggests another point, laddie. When will you get the money from Bodine?"

"When I take the herd through Prineville to-morrow," said Rondo. "We got to go past through town anyway."

"I'll ride in to town with you," said McNab, nodding. "The signing of the note and securing the money will not take long. Well, laddie, I believe you are amply fortified for the expedition. Care should be exercised in Seattle on the purchasing of supplies. Kansas will be of assistance in that matter, too. You are fortunate in the helpers you have selected. Slim is a good man. Kansas has experience and information of value. Laddie——" he eyed Rondo fixedly through the gloom—"in all this business, no mention has been made of Lawson. You have included him in your plans, of course?"

"Lawson," said Rondo, with a touch of somber irritation, "is the only joker in the layout. In every other particular, things have shorely come my way ever since I got the inspired hunch about this Yukon drive. You put up the cattle, made it possible to get the money, advanced saddle hosses an' equipment and otherwise backed my play in a manner to which I shorely wasn't entitled. I got two good men to better my hand. I'm sittin' pretty in every way but one, an' that's Lawson. Just how much grief that jasper's goin' to cause me as a star boarder is one of them mysterious things. Yeah, I've figgered him in. They's a saddle hoss for him in the string, an' saddle, an' blanket roll. All he'll have to fetch along will be his powder puff an' his callin' cards an' his gold-plated toothpick. Otherwise, all details lookin' toward his comfort on this said pleasure trip has done been attended to."

Having spoken with considerable feeling, Rondo hunched his shoulders sheepishly. "I hadn't ought to talk about the critter that a way," he apologized. "He ain't any weak sister. There's iron in him."

"That's a bad situation," McNab rebuked. "There should be no dissension among members of your party. Is your animosity toward him personal, or merely on the grounds that he is an Easterner and a tenderfoot and, therefore, unwelcome."

"I reckon it ain't even personal," Rondo admitted. "I been tryin' to give him a square deal in my mind, but it comes hard. The fact is,"—he squirmed and dug the toe of his boot into the ground at his feet—"him an' me is interested in the same lady. He's kind of got the bulge on me with his polish and said social finesse, which riles me."

"H'm," McNab stroked his jaw thoughtfully. "Miss Bodine?"

Rondo nodded. "He's stayin' at their house. He's there right now—been there all the while we been gettin' the outfit ready."

"That introduces an element that might easily have grave results," McNab warned. "You must fight against your natural jealousy, laddie. Put all that behind you, once you are under way, and deal with him on his own merits."

"That's what I aim to do," said Rondo. "I'll shorely strive noble to recall that it's up to Lila anyway, an' he's entitled to a chance to struggle along. If she picks him, it ain't for me to make a holler."

"Furthermore," suggested McNab, striving to study the youth's expression through the gloom, "I suspect that the lady's favor is not the largest thing involved. You are most interested in getting the beef to Dawson, eh, laddie?"

"Boss," said Rondo wonderingly, "you've got a knack of hittin' the nail on the head. You've put into words somethin' I wouldn't have had the nerve to say out loud. I'll admit that Lila inspired this business. I'm likewise admittin' it's growed on me to such an extent it's kind of put her into the background, if you understand me, boss."

"I do indeed," said McNab. "And it augurs well for your success. If you keep Lawson continually in mind as a possible rival, it would breed distrust and possibly open warfare, which would prejudice your chances. You will pick him up at Prineville to-morrow, then?"

"No," said Rondo, grinning. "I figgered since we don't need him on the first leg of the trip from here to Seattle, which is all routine stuff, he might as well go on to Seattle and wait for us there. He can side-step that much hard work, an' at the same time it'll put off as long as possible the time we got to start enjoyin' his company as a reg'lar diet."

"You won't need him between here and The Dalles," McNab agreed. "Nor on the train with the stock. I assume it's just as well. But have you considered, laddie"—there was a touch of banter in the cattle baron's voice—"he will not have to leave for two or three days? I do not wish to suggest any further jealous reasoning on your part. It has doubtless suggested itself to you. But will he not be given an opportunity to establish himself more firmly in her regard during the two or three days after you have gone?"

"Strength to his arm," said Rondo stubbornly. "It's up to Lila. If under his gilded armor she can find somethin' more worth while than whatever I got to offer, that's her business. If a coupla days will sweep her off her feet, she wasn't for me."

"Bluntly put," McNab applauded. "I can see you have studied it out and have gained the upper hand of your feelings. Well, laddie, we seem to have covered all the ground. Let us retire and prepare for an early start to-morrow, eh?"

"Just the same," Rondo muttered beneath his breath after his employer, bidding him good night, had strode off toward the ranch house, "that Lawson buzzard had best play 'em close to his belt. He riles me."

For a considerable space after McNab had departed, Rondo stood alone in the gloom. He rolled another cigarette and smoked it thoughtfully. In the background of his mind, throughout the day, had been the decision to ride to Prineville on this evening prior to his departure, to say goodby to Lila. He had not thought of it as a decision; he had merely classed it as an inevitable proceeding when the day's work was done. But now, when the moment was at hand, he was not so sure.

About him the great ranch was quieting to slumber. From the bunk house came the chuckling conversation of the crew and the strains of an ancient but singularly harmonious guitar. In ghostly silhouette in the half light the chuck wagon and tack wagon loomed, drawn up and waiting for the morrow. Equipment bulked in the latter vehicle, covered with a tarpaulin; starlight glittered on silver buckles where the harness was looped in readiness over the wagon tongue. Saddle and pack horses segregated for the expedition snorted and stamped at the feed racks. The hundred steers muttered in the corral. All preparations were complete. There was nothing holding him back, he told himself. He should be making dust for Prineville.

As he pondered thus, he tilted his head, listening. From the bunk house, above the plaintive minors of the guitar, came a voice raised in song. Words

and melody were typical of the mood of the McNab buckaroos on this significant night; through the semifacetious offering breathed a suggestion of farewell.

He pulled his hat lower over his eyes, and grinned. He cast down his cigarette and ground it beneath his heel. It was the last night on the ranch, the last time the smoke-blackened walls of the bunk house would resound to the genial debate of a genial, reckless crew who had toiled, played, and fought together of old. Why ride to town while his chuckling cohorts waited? Lawson was undoubtedly at the Bodine mansion.

He would see her to-morrow, he told himself, when the herd rolled past Prineville headed for the Ashwood Trail, The Dalles, Seattle, and points north.

CHAPTER X.

HEADED NORTH.

IN the chill half-light that precedes dawn in the high country, Rondo routed out the crew. In contrast to usual routine early morning activities, they leaped up without protest from their comfortable bunks, donned their clothing and strode forth with an alertness that breathed of suppressed excitement.

The saddle string was fed and watered, the wagon horses harnessed. Profane maledictions from the feed lot indicated the usual battle with mounts which, after years on the range, objected each day to the touch of leather. When the harness horses had devoured their allotments of grain, they were led forth and attached to their respective vehicles. Saddled mounts grouped by the hitching rail, reins trailing.

After a hurried breakfast, men swung to the saddle. The corral gates were opened and the steers crowded forth, heads tossing, suspicious eyes rolling. Two riders waited in the lane to hold the herd. Others hazed them on from the rear. In a compact group the animals milled in the lane while the wagons got under way.

At a signal from Rondo the point men reined aside. The herd thinned out, heading west down the valley of the Crooked River. At sunup, according to schedule, the outfit was on the move.

Hilarious riders were dim in the swirling dust of the well-trampled lane. Enough hands were present to drive twenty times this number of cattle, and the genial ones made the most of it. They dashed hither and yon; their shouts reëchoed with the same enthusiasm as though the entire landscape were alive with beef.

The day was like a glorious omen of good luck for the future. The chill, crystalline air had in it an invigorating quality, as of old wine. The sky was cloudless and of a deep illimitable blue. From afar off came a lilting chorus of meadow larks, and upon the chill breeze from the high places was the pungent odor of sagebrush and the scent of flowers.

A somewhat singular incident occurred as the cavalcade mounted the last ridge in view of the ranch headquarters. Below in the flats, the main herd bearing the McNab brand were as a great red pool of irregular shape, broad in the center and spreading far to east and west. White faces were upturned toward the hundred steers in silhouette against the sky, and following some dim bovine impulse, a shaggy monarch bellowed. Other heads were upflung. The call was taken up throughout the ranks of the watching army. Scattering at first; it swelled in volume until it became a vast rumble that shook the very air. It might have been merely curiosity that caused the uproar, or a challenge to moving objects beyond their nearsighted vision. But from the marching column came

an answering bellow which, under the circumstances and at the precise moment, clothed the incident with an almost pathetic significance.

Rondo, riding in the rear with McNab, put the thought into words.

"They don't know why they're goin', nor where," he chuckled, "but they're sayin' good-by."

"True," McNab nodded. "You may come back in style. Or you may come limping home. But these steers will never return."

Where the valley widened out within sight of Prineville, Rondo and McNab spurred forward to the head of the column and the former beckoned Slim and Kansas to draw near.

"Swing the herd in north of town and hold 'em up on the upper flat," he instructed the gaunt one. "Kansas, trail along with me an' Mr. McNab. We got some business in Prineville."

The trio had spurred forward some distance ahead of the herd when Rondo motioned for a halt.

"Come to think of it, you'd best go back to the tack wagon, Kansas, an' fetch along yore powder puffs or any little thing you'll need," he advised, "You're goin' on a trip."

"Where?" demanded Kansas.

"To Seattle," said Rondo. "Take the stage this afternoon and catch the train from The Dalles. You'll beat the herd to Seattle by a week, maybe more. Which won't be too much time for what you got to do. But go get whatever you crave to take along. Slope after us to the Bank of Prineville, after I'll give you instructions."

"I'm all set, boss," averred Kansas, his harsh features writhing into a grin. "I'm a gent that travels light. I won't need my blanket roll an' I got my chewin' tobacco. Let's go."

As they loped toward town, Rondo outlined to Kansas the object in sending him on in advance, which was to seek out and absorb any and all data pertaining to the Yukon that might have the slightest bearing on the expedition. He emphasized particularly the importance of inquiring into the status of transportation, and data bearing on any inland trails to the Klondike which would enable them to detour around the White Pass and the headwaters of the Yukon.

"Wow!" breathed Kansas. "You coudn't have given me no chore that would suit me better. You can depend on me, boss. When you meet up with me in Seattle, I'll be loaded down with knowledge I'd sink to my knees in solid rock. I'm a modest gent, but as an information-getter, I'm a wolf."

In the lull following the strenuous week-end of business and conviviality, the streets were all but deserted. The trio rode up the dusty main thoroughfare of the cattle country metropolis and dismounted at the hitching rail before the Bank of Prineville. McNab and Rondo entered, leaving Kansas at the curb.

Banker Bodine's desk, in his private office, was so disposed that when the door was open it commanded a view of the bank entrance. It was open now, and the money baron was at his desk. He motioned them to come into the inner sanctum. As they nodded to the cashier and clerks and pushed past the swinging gate, Rondo saw that the banker was not alone. The graceful figure of Lawson lounged against the wall near the window, cigarette in hand.

"Sit down, gents," invited the banker. "Nice day. I reckon you lads are ready to transact a little business, huh? McNab, this here's Syd Lawson, son of an old pal of mine in the East. He's the lad I spoke to you about the other night who'll trail with Rondo to the Klondike."

Rondo and Lawson nodded briefly. McNab shook hands with the debonair youth, studying his features with grave intentness.

"A pleasure to meet you, sir," said Lawson with careless courtesy. "Mr. Bodine, if you have business with these gentlemen, I'll run along."

"Oh, no." The banker waved the suggestion aside. "It ain't necessary, Syd. This here refers to this cattle drive in which you got a hand." His cold eyes rested on Rondo. "When you figger on starting, young feller?"

"We've already started." Rondo flushed and spoke bluntly to cover his self-consciousness. "The boys are holdin' the herd just outside of the town."

"Yeah?" The banker stared, his brows lowering. He leaned back in his chair and fumbled for a cigar. "You're moving fast. What about Lawson here?"

"It'll take us over a week to drive to The Dalles," said Rondo. "No use Lawson trailin' along. He can go on up to Seattle about the end of the week an' wait for us. He'll get plenty of grief from Seattle, North. On this first stretch it ain't necessary, an' I reckon he'd just as soon avoid it."

The banker pondered for a moment, chewing on his cigar. Then he nodded.

"Correct," he agreed. "Syd'll wait for you in Seattle. Well, gents, I got the note all drawn up." He segregated the document from a stack of papers and pushed it across the desk. "Sign there, an' there. You'll be drawin' out yore account, too, eh Rondo? How d'ye want this money—gold or notes?"

"It isn't well to carry too much currency on your person, laddie," McNab suggested. "Take what you need between here and Seattle, and Bodine could perhaps give you a draft on a Seattle bank for the balance."

"Good idea," said the banker. "I'll draw on Dexter-Horton."

"There's eight hundred in my account," said Rondo. "Two thousand in the note. Three hundred cash should be enough to take us to Seattle. That'll leave twenty-five hundred in this said draft."

Details of the transaction were soon concluded. Rondo and McNab signed the note. A bank assistant brought in the currency requested by Rondo, and the banker drew up the draft for the balance. It was at this point that McNab requested a blank bill of sale from Bodine. He filled this out and handed it to Rondo without comment. By its terms the latter was set forth as the sole owner of one hundred prime steers bearing the McNab brand.

"I don't need this, boss," protested Rondo. "Having the steers is plenty for any questions."

"Take it along," said McNab. "It will be useful in case your ownership is protested at law."

Rondo accordingly, placed the document in his wallet with the currency and draft.

All three arose. The banker extended his hand. Rondo grasped it briefly. Lawson, unnoticed, leaned negligently against the wall, his gaze lifted to the blue smoke of his cigarette curling toward the ceiling.

"Good-by," said Bodine. His gimlet eyes were touched with a species of mild amusement. "Good luck."

"Thanks," said Rondo, flushing to the roots of his hair.

He turned away, followed by McNab. Halting at the door, he looked somewhat doubtfully at Lawson. But the debonair youth waved him away with a gesture.

"See you in a moment, Rondo," he said, with almost insolent composure. "If you don't mind waiting."

Rondo nodded and strode forth.

Kansas was waiting at the curb. He was leaning against the hitching rail in negligent pose, but he was grinning in conscious importance and his leathery cheek bulged with an enormous chew. From certain points along the main street, the distant herd could be seen in

silhouette against the sky. It had been noised abroad that "Rondo's beef" was starting North, and the cattle country metropolis was alert to mark even minor details of a significant event. A handful of spectators milled near by. Storekeepers stood at the doors of their establishments, faces turned toward the saddled horse before the bank. A group of mounted men had pulled up. These lolled in the saddle, legs looped over pommels.

Rondo motioned to Kansas and the trio stood at the stirrups of their mounts.

"Well, Kansas," the youth extended a roll of bills to the old-timer, "here's your transportation to Seattle an' expenses. You got your orders. You know the chore we got to do. So get all the dope you can that'll have a bearin' on our play."

"I'll soak it up," Kansas promised, producing an ancient wallet and stowing the currency in its accordionlike interior.

Rondo and McNab swung to the saddle. Kansas, standing by his own mount, laid a hand on the paint's neck and looked questioningly at his employer.

"I'll lead his horse back to the outfit," McNab told Rondo. "I'll wait for you there, laddie, and say good-by. You still have a little unfinished business in town, eh?"

Rondo nodded at this discreet reference to his leave-taking with Lila.

"Adios, cowboy," he told Kansas, grinning. "See you later."

McNab had gathered up the paint's trailing reins when Lawson stepped forth from behind the group at the bank entrance.

"It isn't necessary for you to lead the animal, Mr. McNab," he offered smilingly. "I'll ride him."

Kansas, backing toward the curb, halted and surveyed the debonair youth. His shaggy brows knitted.

"Who says so?" he demanded. "Stranger, you're a mite optimistic."

"Hold on," Rondo interjected, chuckling as he realized that the debonair youth and the truculent old-timer were meeting for the first time. "Kansas, this is Lawson, who's trailin' with us. He can take the critter up to the outfit if it's O. K. with you."

"Well, I'm danged," stated Kansas, in some astonishment, surveying the youth anew. "So you're Lawson, huh? Excuse it, mister. I didn't aim to be so short with you, but you kind of took me by surprise. Sure it's O. K. with me. That is," he amended, "if you figger you can ride him."

"Isn't he gentle?" inquired Lawson, gathering up the reins.

Kansas glanced questioningly at Rondo, his black eyes betraying a guarded twinkle. But Rondo shook his head.

"He's a mite skittish," Kansas admitted. "Kind of a one-man hoss that a way."

This statement, in the cattle country, meant much. But Lawson, evidently led astray by the calm, almost lethargic appearance of the stocky paint, chose to disregard it. He laid hold on pommel and cantle.

"Maybe you'd best let McNab lead him, at that," advised Rondo. But Lawson, as though spurred on by this counsel from his rival, prepared to swing aloft.

Whereupon the spectators, who had been following this interchange, betrayed a marked interest. Those near at hand drew back, distant ones became more alert, and mounted ones reined a little away, grinning.

As Lawson's right foot found the stirrup and he settled back, the paint's head swung lazily and his ears flattered like one mildly resentful at being roused from pleasant reflections. One white, heavy-lidded eye leered at his rider. He was standing in an apparently list-

less attitude, and from this attitude he exploded upward in a sudden furious lunge.

It was a straight, skyward leap; and Lawson rose with it. He continued to rise above the animal's arched back. For a photographic instant he poised like an eagle in flight, with nothing more substantial beneath him than ten feet of thin air. Gyrating, he fell into the dust with such a hearty thud as to cause the grinning spectators to grunt in sympathy.

For a moment he lay gasping. Then he reared stiffly to hand and knee. No man stepped forth to help him to his feet or to explore the extent of his injuries. The crowd watched, grins fixed, thumbs hooked in belts. Mounted men sat passive, but with eyes intent.

Lawson crouched, his lately sleek hair unkempt over his flushed features, his natty clothing dust-covered. He glared about him at the grinning crowd, at the mounted men; and momentarily his black eyes fixed with a fierce intentness on Rondo's face. But Rondo was not smiling. His boyish features were grave, his blue eyes merely quizzical.

Lawson leaped up suddenly and approached the paint. The short-tempered animal was sidling away, reins trailing, rolling eyes alert. Lawson pounced upon the reins and braced himself against the paint's backward lunge. Then he looped the reins over the animal's head, laid hold purposefully on pommel and cantle, placed foot in stirrup, and swung aloft.

Whereupon Rondo and McNab spurred in on either side of the paint and grasped the animal's bridle.

"Get away!" grated Lawson between his teeth. "I'll ride him."

"Sure you will," Rondo soothed. "But wait till Kansas cusses him a little first."

Kansas had strode forward as Lawson had remounted. He now planted himself before the paint and shook a hairy fist before the animal's rolling eyes.

"You slab-sided coyote!" he admonished, with an appearance of great ferocity. "Don't you know nothin' a-tall? Is that any way to treat a gent? Be good, you sulphurous, superheated hunk of iniquity, or I'll shorely brain you. All right, now," he told Lawson confidently, backing away, "just so he figgers it ain't any disgrace to carry you, he'll be gentle as a kitten. Rein him in severe an' start him off."

It was obvious that Lawson held little faith in this optimistic statement. He settled himself firmly in the saddle, his long legs awkward in the too-short stirrups, grasped the reins and prodded the animal smartly in the ribs. His grim determination was in marked contrast to the paint's docility of manner when Rondo and McNab cast loose. For the truculent animal, as though satisfied with his brief display of independence, stepped nonchalantly forth, his heavy-lidded eyes serene. Lawson's set features flushed a darker red at the crowd's good-natured guffaw.

For the spectators the brief incident was closed. Their attention now centered on Rondo, who, with McNab, had turned away. Genial faces were upturned; white teeth flashed. Far up and down the street hands were flung aloft in farewell.

"So long, Rondo!" It was a brief, heartfelt tribute from many voices. "Good luck!"

Rondo waved his hat in acknowledgment. McNab and Lawson swung in beside him. Mounted men twisted in the saddle to watch them go. Rondo, too, looked back briefly down the familiar street, then turned, squared himself in the saddle and pulled his hat lower over his eyes.

At the corner, McNab turned away.

"See you up on the hill, laddie," he said.

Rondo nodded and looked questioningly at Lawson, who remained at his side.

"I'm not going up to the herd for a minute or two," he said pointedly. "Got a little errand to attend to."

"So have I," said Lawson.

Rondo tightened the reins and moved forward. Lawson moved forward with him.

"Listen," said Rondo, eying him squarely. "I'm going down to the Bodine house."

"Of course," said Lawson. "That's where I'm going. But not," he added dryly, "for the purpose of making myself obnoxious. You are welcome to as secluded and dramatic a farewell with Lila as you please. It occurs to me that there are a few little knick-knacks of mine that might be sent along with the equipment."

They rode on in silence, Rondo flushed and somewhat ill at ease, Lawson rigid and awkward in the saddle, his lean jaw outthrust. Rondo studied the other covertly as they rode, striving anew to analyze the personality of this debonair and gloomy youth. In the midst of this appraisal, Lawson turned his face toward him. His dark eyes revealed an expression foreign to his usual suave self-assuranc. It was apologetic, almost abashed.

"Sorry to have made such a spectacle of myself back yonder," he said with a shamefaced grin that momentarily transformed him. It made him appear less worldly wise, less cynical, more boyish. "The good citizens hereabouts will believe you have selected a poor assistant for your enterprise."

"You mean because you got bucked off?" questioned Rondo. "Sho, that don't amount to anythin'. The best of us sprout wings once in a while. The fact that you climbed aboard again pronto took the curse off it. They figger you're green, but O. K."

"Thanks," said Lawson, his cynical self again. "That's vastly encouraging."

In imagination Rondo had pictured his leave-taking with Lila as an interval that must inevitably be breath-taking, a wistfully exalted moment that would endure in memory. The reality was in the nature of a psychological let-down.

She met them at the door, a vision of loveliness, as always. But when she saw Lawson's disheveled clothing she frowned and her somwhat petulant lips compressed.

"Oh, Syd," she breathed, "what have they done to you? Have some of those young toughs tried to humiliate you with their rough horseplay?"

"Horseplay is a good word," said Lawson lightly. "I tried to ride one and he bucked me off. No harm done, I assure you."

"You know he isn't used to these range horses." She turned accusingly on Rondo. "It's unfair to take advantage of a stranger that way. Why did you let him do it?"

"Let me?" echoed Lawson. "Lady, that's the very thing I've been battling. Since when must I be protected from the cruel world? No, I rode the animal from choice, and he chose to buck me off. But if you'll excuse me, I'll dash inside," he said hastily, with a glance at Rondo, who stood twisting his hat in his hands. "Got a few things to get together and take up to the cattle."

The girl stepped out on the veranda, her gaze following Lawson as he strode through the living room and up the broad stairway.

"What did he mean about the cattle, Ron? What cattle?"

"The beef I'm takin' up to the Klondike," said Rondo. "You've heard about it, I reckon."

"From everybody but you," she said. "I would have been lots more thrilled if you had told me about it yourself.

It's wonderful. But where is the beef?"

"Outside of town." He gestured toward the north. "The boys are holdin' the herd up on the flat while I come into town to do a few errands—an' say good-by."

"To do a few errands," she mimicked, "and say good-by. I seem to be quite incidental. You mean you have actually started, Ron?"

"We're on our way to The Dalles. Right now, when I leave here. I move north continuous. What do you think of the layout, Lila?" he questioned eagerly. "Figger I've got a chance? You wishin' me luck?"

"Of course," she said. "I wish you every success. I don't know much about these things, but dad doesn't seem to think it a very promising enterprise." Her voice was matter of fact. Rondo felt baffled, thwarted. Eying her fixedly, the grin faded from his flushed face.

"Well," he said, "I reckon I'd better drag along." He moved a step away from her toward the open door and raised his voice: "Lawson! Hey, cowboy! Let's go!"

"Coming." Lawson's somewhat muffled reply came from the upper regions.

"Good-by, Lila," Rondo turned to her and held out his hand. "It'll be quite a spell before I see you again. But I'll think of you plenty."

"And I'll think of you, too Ron. Listen, is Syd leaving on such short notice, too?"

"Oh, no," said Rondo. "He'll be around a few days. He's joinin' up with us at Seattle."

She smiled at him suddenly with a devastating smile and moved closer, face upturned. She disengaged her hand and placed it gently on his shoulder.

"Good-by," she said softly. "I shouldn't be so horrid to you. You're doing this for me, aren't you? You may—kiss me good-by, Ron."

He placed his arm somewhat awkwardly about her. She half averted her face and he pressed his lips to her cheek. Her nearness, the fragrance of her hair, the velvety texture of her cheek, swept away all his inhibitions and inward bitterness. He crushed her to him; but at the sound of Lawson's approaching step she struggled against his restraining arms and pushed him away.

She turned toward the door, her cheeks flushed a little, and with deft fingers rearranged her hair before Lawson appeared. At sight of him, her eyes widened. Rondo, too, examined the other with a new appraisal.

Lawson had changed from his city clothing to a rougher outfit of tailored corduroys, high-topped boots, and flannel shirt. Attired thus, he seemed somehow changed of personality; he was no longer a model of sartorial elegance, but seemed more businesslike and self-assured—a muscular person garbed for the trail. A cigarette drooped from his thin lips. A waterproof knapsack was slung over one shoulder.

Disregarding Lila, his dark eyes fixed quizzically on Rondo.

"I'm ready, chief," he said, "let's go."

"Up to the herd?"

"To the Klondike," said Lawson, flicking the ashes from his cigarette with an airy gesture.

"What do you mean, Syd?" questioned Lila breathlessly.

"It's this way, Rondo," said Lawson. "I object to being brushed aside, and having arrangements made for me with an eye to my comfort. Why should I go by stage and train to Seattle while you boys are bringing the beef? I'll join you now, stay with the herd, and take my part to whatever conclusion is in store for the enterprise.

I need the experience in handling cattle. I expect to do my part on the trail to the Yukon. Have you any objection to that?"

Rondo studied him briefly, then shook his head.

"No objection," he said. "There's nothin' but work takin' the beef to Seattle. You'll eat dust between here an' The Dalles, get saddle-sore, an' sleep on rocks. That's all."

"O. K." said Lawson. He turned, removed his hat, and extended his hand. "Good-by, Lila. I'm leaving the rest of my useless luggage here. Thank you for your hospitality and many courtesies." He smiled, his white teeth flashing. "See you again some time, I hope."

"You men!" said Lila stormily, tears of vexation and petulance in her eyes. "You make your plans and disregard me utterly. You didn't tell me you were going to-day, Syd."

"I didn't know it until a few minutes ago," said Lawson. "Don't you think it's best? I don't want to be a useless member of the expedition, you know."

Lila bit her lip, glanced swiftly at Rondo and back again. She smiled and moved closer. With the same gesture that had previously lifted Rondo to dizzy heights, she placed her hand on Lawson's shoulder, stood on tiptoe and kissed his cheek. "Good-by, Syd," she said, relaxing against him, her face upturned.

Lawson stood erect, his dark eyes studying her with grave composure. Then his right arm encircled her and he bent his head. Looking past her as their lips met, his quizzical glance rested on Rondo, who stood rigid, teeth clenched.

"I'll be glad to see you again, Syd," she said softly, their faces close, "whether you find gold or not. Take care of yourself, won't you? He'll look out for you, too, won't you, Ron?"

"Lady," said Lawson, with a lightness of manner that enraged Rondo anew, "if this farewell becomes any more fond or lingering, friend Rondo will be glad to see me torn limb from limb. Yes, I'm able to take care of myself, I think." He kissed her again and with his left hand flicked the ashes from his cigarette. "Adios. Let's go, chief."

Rondo strode down the steps, pulling his hat lower over his eyes. Lawson followed. Lila leaned against the pillar in graceful pose, her cheek resting against her hand, and watched them mount their waiting horses. She blew them kisses as they wheeled. Both waved their hats in parting salute. Rondo's splendid buckskin leaped away. The paint followed in more choppy stride. Neither looked back as they thundered up the quiet street, forged around the corner and were gone.

Rondo rode grimly, in the grip of a furious rage and chagrin that was directed not so much at Lawson as at Lila. Almost, in the bitterness of the moment, he regretted having gone to the Bodine mansion to say good-by. Had he not, he told himself, his memory of Lila would have been a different one. He would not have suffered the humiliation of seeing her in Lawson's arms.

Yet, as he rode, the wind was keen against his face. Leaving the outskirts of town, the sunlit world unfolded before him. Almost in awe he realized that in a matter of moments the sickening sense of futility and defeat was dissipating like mist in the background of his mind. He was leaving Lila behind him, as he was leaving his routine and familiar world. These things were already in the past. Stirring events lay ahead. The staggering realization came to him that the humiliation of the preceding moments had left his incentive for the adventurous expedition unimpaired. The drive was

the thing. Far to the north lay the Klondike and Dawson. The herd was waiting on the ridge.

He drew a deep breath and peered about him, blinking, like one facing into the strengthening light of a new dawn. He slowed his horse to an easier pace and reached for the makings. When Lawson pulled up alongside he eyed that youth almost with tolerance as he lighted his cigarette.

"Let's get this straight, Lawson," he said. "I mean as regards to Lila. I don't entirely savvy your game yet. I ain't certain I admire the color of yore eyes. We'll see how you stack up when a show-down comes. But as far as the lady is concerned, if she chooses not to play any favorites, it's jake with me."

"Bluntly stated," approved Lawson lightly. "Forgetting inconsequential details, we devote our attention to the task at hand, eh? It's agreed, chief. But since you mention it, let me assure you that the lady's—er—manner of farewell was merely an example of feminine impulse. I would not have you believe that I staged it for the purpuse of embarrassing you."

"'S all right," said Rondo, shrugging his shoulders.

They were mounting the slope now. The waiting riders spurred to meet them as they reached the crest, the gaunt McNab in the lead.

The latter's farewell was brief.

"Good-by, laddie," he said, crushing Rondo's hand in his bony grasp. "It is a fair adventure upon which you are embarked. Good luck."

"Boss," said Rondo, simply, "what you've done is appreciated an' won't be forgotten. See you again."

He shook hands with each of the crew, as did the gaunt Slim. To the uninitiated it would have appeared that the leave-taking was casual to the point of indifference; but Rondo knew that real feeling was concealed beneath the profane words and genial comments with which the hard-bitten youths wished him well.

"Slim," said Rondo, "this here's Lawson, who's trailin' with the herd instead of waitin' for us in Seattle. You ride paint and he can take the swing. I'll pound 'em on the tail. Throw yore pack in the wagon, Lawson. Slim'll give you pointers on how to handle them steers. Give that paint his head an' he'll haze 'em into line. All set? Let's go."

The grazing herd were bunched on the flat. Slim rode among them and started the leaders forth while Lawson, under the gaunt one's instructions, patrolled the flanks. Rondo brought up the rear.

"Hi-yi!" bellowed Slim; and Lawson, learning quickly the value of noise in starting the cattle, echoed exultantly: *"Yip! Yip!"*

Slowly the herd got under way. Lone animals charging forth were hazed back into the ranks. Rondo, circling the rear, gave momentum to the forward march. The driver of the harness team cracked his whip, and the haltered horses of the saddle string followed the creaking wagon.

While the watching buckaroos, grouped about their employer in motionless silhouette at the edge of the plateau, waved the riders on, the hundred steers moved forth as a long red serpent, heading north.

To be continued in next week's issue of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE.

Save My Child!

By Roland Krebs

Author of "Hungry Flames," etc.

BIG, black clouds sweeping suddenly over the R Bar R sent a flood of rain down so suddenly with crashes of thunder and darts of lightning that we all streaked for the shelter of the bunk house.

"This sure ain't no sizzle-sozzling rain," "Biffalo" Bull remarked as he stood in the door and watched the torrents making puddles. He turned around and counted noses. "Wonder where 'Shorty' Nolan is."

"I seen him going down to put a new hinge on the gate at the county road," "Hungry" Hosford announced, biting off half an apple.

"Here he comes now." Biffalo bent forward and peered through the rain. "What's he got his hat and coat off for, the derned loon? And what's he carrying?"

We crowded to the door and windows and looked. Shorty, all frowns, had something wrapped in his coat and topped off with his hat. His hair was soaked and hung down his dripping face in wisps.

"Well, I'm a Chinese laundryman if he ain't toting a baby!" "Red" Johns busted out.

Sure enough, Shorty Nolan had a youngster wrapped up in his coat, and protected on top from the rain by his hat. The kid was squealing for all get out.

"Wonder if that's his latest purchase from the mail-order houses," "Natural" Neely speculated.

"Well, if it ain't 'Our Little Nell' back from the city," Biffalo yelled, as Mr. Nolan sloshed through the puddles. "Welcome home, my datter. Yore old pa warned you against that derned city feller and his sneaky ways, but no

matter what you done, gal, there's always a place fer ye in this ol' home o' ourn."

"Aw, shut up!" Shorty growled. "You, too!" he mumbled to the screeching infant, dumping it on a bunk.

"Where'd you get the kid?" Hungry asked, taking the wrapper off a bar of milk chocolate.

"It belongs to Mrs. Renwick—you know, the wife of Angus Renwick, the tightwad guy that owns the filling station in town," Shorty explained, taking off wet clothes and reaching for dry ones.

"How come her to make you a present of this music box?" Hungry yelled above the noise of the crying baby.

"Aw, she was driving over to see Mrs. Tompkins in Angus' old touring car. Remember that old wreck with no top on it? Just as she got to the side road down there the storm started to break.

"Well, she still had five miles to cover and was afraid the brat would get wet and be took down with pneumonia or something, and so she asked me if I'd mind taking care of it. Little Angus ain't no bother at all, she claimed. Listen to that bellering! Wouldn't you call that bother?"

"When's she aiming to get him back again?" Natural Neely inquired.

"Not till late this afternoon," Shorty sighed. "She's invited to a little coffee-and-cake party Mrs. Tompkins is having. Hang my hide in a tanyard if I don't sometimes wish I didn't have such a nice, kind face. Listen to that little critter yell!"

Little Angus was certainly bearing down hard with his vocal cords.

"Gosh!" Shorty muttered, holding both hands to his head. "His mother said he'd probably keep right on sleeping all afternoon."

"Maybe he's just crying in his sleep," "Red" Johns suggested.

Biffalo gave him a dirty look. "What's the difference to you and me whether he's crying asleep or crying awake? He's crying, and that's enough! I bet he's hungry. Shorty, run out to the cook shack and tell the chef to fix the little runt up a steak and some onions."

"Aw, you old stiff, eighteen-months-old babies don't eat such stuff as steak and onions," the little cow-punch sniffed.

"Yeah? Well, what do they eat?"

"Oh, chopped-up egg and milk and paregoric and such as that. Anyway, his mother never said nothing about him grazing and sluicing while here and I wouldn't want to feed him nothing. Might have a weak stomach."

"He certainly ain't got weak lungs or a sore throat," Natural Neely observed, as Little Angus hit a couple of more high notes.

"She ought to have given me a pacifier for the little hellion," Shorty snapped.

"What's a pacifier?" Hungry Hosford asked, after swallowing a bite of sandwich.

"Usually a round, celluloid ring you give a kid to chew on when he's hungry and it ain't time yet for him to put on the nose bag," Natural explained. "It pacifies them."

"I bet nobody ever fooled Hungry Hosford with a pacifier," Biffalo commented, as Mr. Hosford began working on a second sandwich. "If they did ever give him one, I bet he never chewed on it. He et it."

"Hey! I got an idea," Red Johns informed us. "You know all them bone rings on that set of mule harness out in the shed? They look just like pacifiers. I'll cut one off and feed it to this little Scotch high-noter."

Red slipped on a poncho and a hat and pretty soon was back with a white harness ring.

"Gimme that!" Shorty Nolan ordered him, snatching the ring just before Red

could offer it to the kid. "Anybody can see you don't know nothing about baby-raising! It's got to be boiled first."

"What for? To make it tender?" Red asked.

"No; to kill the bacteria."

"What's bacteria?" Red demanded.

"Germs. Bugs."

Red looked at the bone ring in Shorty's hand. "I don't see no bugs on it," he growled.

"'Course you don't," Shorty answered him. "They're invisible."

"Well, if they're so little that you can't see 'em, it's a cinch he won't be able to taste them."

"Aw, you're just plain ignorant. Boiling kills disease."

"Say, listen; the mule that wears that harness ain't had a sick day in his life," yelped Red, whose job it was to look after that animal.

Shorty Nolan just ignored Red Johns and boiled some water. He dropped the ring into the water, then cooled and dried it, and stuffed it into the bawling youngster's chubby little fist. Angus Renwick, Jr., showed his appreciation by pitching the bone ring to the floor and screeching louder than ever.

"Maybe he wants some Worcestershire sauce or ketchup on it," old Biffalo laughed.

Shorty picked the kid up and rocked it in his arms. "Aw, whatta matter wis um itty li'l feller? Does um miss ums mamma?" he cooed.

"For the love of mud! Let the little pest holler," Biffalo Bull shouted. "It's better'n listening to you talk baby talk."

"I know what would shut him off in a jiffy," Shorty told us after studying a while. "You know, a mother always sings lullabies to her kid when she wants to quiet him or make him sleep."

"What's a lullaby?" asked Hungry Hosford, who thinks he has a tenor voice.

"A song."

"Well, I'll sing him a song," Hungry announced, laying down a bag of salted peanuts he had been nibbling. "If that's all he wants, he's fixed up."

"You got to rock him in your arms when you sing," Maw Nolan added.

"Suits me," Hungry agreed. He picked Angus, Jr., up and laid the little guy across one arm, stern uppermost.

Between Shorty, Natural, and me, we finally got him to hold the baby straight. Then Hungry sang:

"Oh, there was a little hen and she had a wooden leg;
The best little hen that ever laid an egg;
She laid more eggs than any on the farm;
Another little drink wouldn't do us any harm."

Little Angus yowled louder than ever before and so Hungry sang him "The Face on the Barroom Floor," "The Tattooed Lady," and "Hail, Hail, the Gang's All Here!" Master Renwick bawled on.

"All I can say for that little yearlin' is he don't know good music when he hears it," Hungry snorted in disgust.

"He probably didn't hear it on account of his own music," Natural Neely pointed out. "Maybe he's got a pin stuck in his hide."

We examined the kid all over but there wasn't any pins sticking in him.

"Aw, shucks! I know what's ailin' him," Shorty finally told us. "He ain't got any toys."

"Sure enough!" Hungry put in sarcastically. "Biffalo, get him your tin soldiers and fireman's suit to play with."

"Here, let him play with this," Biff said. taking the shells out of his single-action .45 and setting it before Angus.

"Why don't you give him some razor blades and a few sticks of dynamite to play with, too?" I asked the old dean of the bunk house.

To our surprise, the baby actually quit bawling and started to fumble with the gun. First thing you know he was actually smiling and showing his few little teeth and cooing and seemed just as happy.

It wasn't long, though, before he cut loose with some more wailing.

We got him an egg-beater from the cook shack, and he quit bawling for a while then.

"Give him a heap of stuff to occupy his attention," Natural Neely suggested, contributing a pair of dice.

I had a good laugh when I saw what the R Bar R boys thought would make good substitutes for toys. Shorty Nolan contributed a tire pump, Hungry Hosford donated a pair of his own shoes and Shorty's watch, Bill Tell offered little "Hoot Mon" a couple of his pipes, and Biffalo Bull threw in a new plug of chewing tobacco.

"Aw, who ever heard of giving a baby chewing tobacco?" Hungry scoffed. "Want to make him sick?"

"That just for him to play with—throw up in the air and so on," Biff said. "He don't know enough to try to chew it."

Little Angus pawed around for a few minutes with his new treasures, but in the end began to bawl all over again.

"Maybe he wants a rattle," "Slim" Evers suggested.

"Then bring your flivver in here and start it for him," Biffalo advised.

"I guess he wants some kind of entertainment," Shorty Nolan observed.

Biffalo chuckled. Then his face got serious. "If by entertainment you mean having Hungry sing again, I, for one, won't stand for it."

"Who can do stunts?" Shorty inquired.

"I'm pretty good with a billiard cue," Natural reminded us, "if anybody's got a billiard table in his pocket."

"I'll stand on my head for him," Slim Evers announced.

"You'll be standing on a good, solid foundation," Shorty sarcasted him.

Little Angus didn't care for Slim's stunt until our acrobat lost his balance and, in falling over, poked one heel into a window pane and broke it into smithereens. The kid must have had a destructive nature, because he gurgled happily at this, only to bawl afresh when this great amusement feature wasn't repeated.

"Ain't any sense in humoring him too far," Biff pointed out, "or he'll carry it to a point where nothin' will suit him except we set the house on fire."

We tried putting on an Indian war-path dance, everybody yelling, but Mr. Renwick's son and heir merely showed us he could outhowl any one in the bunk house.

We were at the end of our rope, but Angus, Jr., wasn't at the end of his concert program.

"Gee, if it would only quit raining, we could go out and leave him here to yelp hisself hoarse," Biffalo sighed.

Shorty Nolan, who had been thinking, suddenly leaped up off his stool with a smile.

"I got it!" he yelled above the racket. "I know what he wants. He's a Scotch kid. ain't he? He wants——"

"If it's Scotch whisky he's yelling for and he gets it, I'm going to start crying my ownself," Hungry interrupted.

"If he wants a bagpipe concert he'll get it—only over my dead body," Biffalo warned.

"He wants a nickel, I'll bet," Shorty said.

"Aw, git out," Slim sniffed. "He wouldn't be satisfied with nothing less'n a twenty-dollar gold piece, considering the way he's been screeching."

"Coins don't make any difference to kids at his age," Shorty said, reaching into a pocket. "All money looks alike to them."

"Not to Scotch kids it don't."

Shorty got out all his change, but found no nickel. He picked out a dime and put it into Little Angus' fist.

Friends, I wish you could have seen the change; instantly the storm broke—or, rather, both storms broke; the one inside and the one outside.

Little Angus quit crying as suddenly as if he'd lost his voice. Through his tears he stared at the shiny dime. Then he started to coo and chuckle and gurgle. Shorty Nolan set him down on the floor, and there he sat, passing his dime from one chubby little fist to the other, throwing it in the air, picking it up, and examining it over and over again.

"Boy, you should have been a papa," Biffalo told Shorty with admiration.

Now that he had his dime, Angus Renwick, Jr., seemed to be at peace with the world. He fumbled happily with Biff's gun—but always kept one hand on the ten-cent piece—and tossed Biffalo's chewing tobacco around, and monkeyed with his egg-beater, and seemed to be amused with all the toys that he had spurned before.

"He appears to be getting along nicely now," Shorty Nolan said, "and the rain's stopped, so we can just leave him be and get back to work."

We thought maybe Angus would start rumpusing when we all went out, but he was so wrapped up in his dime that he didn't pay any attention to us at all.

Half an hour later, Shorty, who was helping me and Hungry put up some new fence posts, dropped his post-hole digger, got first pale, and then purple, and then held his hands to his dome.

"Good gosh!" he busted out. "What a terrible thing for me to do—to give that kid a dime to play with!"

"Terrible? I thought it was a swell idea," Hungry said.

"Yeah," Shorty told him, wild-eyed; "but you know how kids are everlastingly putting things in their mouths. I bet he's swallowed it!"

He dropped the post-hole digger and streaked for the bunk house.

"Say, that's right," Hungry added and we ran after Shorty.

When we got into the bunk house our fears appeared to be realized. Little Angus wasn't playing. He wasn't crying, either. He was sort of leaning against a chair leg with a sick expression on his face. Honest, the kid looked to me like he was in a bad way.

Shorty got frantically down on his hands and knees and began groping around on the floor.

"Oh, Heaven, help me find that dime!" he prayed.

Hungry and I looked, too, but the dime wasn't nowheres to be found.

"Run into the ranch house and use the phone, Hungry!" Shorty yelled. "Call a doctor. Call all the doctors in town. Tell them to bring along their stomach pumps, and their X-ray cameras and extra rolls of film. Hurry!"

Hungry shot out of the bunk house, and Shorty and I and some of the other boys began going over the floor with a fine-tooth comb, so to speak, hunting for the dime we were afraid we would not find.

We looked under mats, and bunks, and into every nook and corner, but no dime was to be found. Poor Shorty was almost in tears.

Twenty minutes later Doctors Hugo Richter, Ewald D. Hesselmann, and Thomas D. Kitchell came driving up to the bunk house in their cars altogether, and busted out with such dash and hurry that you'd think Hungry had told them Little Angus had swallowed a locomotive.

They stripped the kid of everything but his socks and then began their examination, while Shorty stood right beside them and panted.

"Der childt is onquestionably seek, don't you dink so, doctor?" Doctor Hesselmann said to Doctor Kitchell.

"No question about it, doctor," said Doc Kitchell. "I rather think it's traceable to something the infant has eaten. Do you agree with me, doctor?"

"Obsolutely, doctor," Doc Richter chimed in.

This, I thought, was a pretty accurate guess, seeing as how we had told these

three guys that Angus had eaten a dime. They pawed the kid over some more —and he didn't cry, which convinced me he was sick, all right.

"Look at dem shtains aroundt d' mouth," Doc Richter said. "Dot's tobacco, I dink."

"Yes, tobacco," was Doc Kitchell's confirmation.

I picked up Biffalo's quid and found sure enough that the little Renwick brat had nibbled at one corner of it.

"Very harmful practice—giving an eighteen-month-old child chewing tobacco," Doc Kitchell announced, frowning.

"Yeah, but it's worse when they eat dimes," Shorty said. "Do something, doctor. Take an X ray or something."

Doctor Kitchell agreed that an X ray would have to be made, but pointed out that you couldn't make such pictures on the spur of the moment like you take a snapshot.

"We shall have to get a fast car and drive to Missoula, where there are the proper facilities," he told us.

A snorting flivver outside interrupted the medical conference. Shorty Nolan grew ashen when he saw it was the mother, Mrs. Renwick.

"Mercy! Is there something wrong with Junior?" she asked, shaking.

"He—uh—he swallowed a dime," Shorty informed her.

Mrs. Renwick collapsed in a chair. "Couldn't you snatch it away from him in time?" she gasped.

"He swallowed it while we was all outside."

"Didn't you see him swallow it?"

"No, ma'am, but it's gone. It's a cinch he swallowed it."

Mrs. Renwick grabbed her offspring from the doctors and rolled down one of her otherwise undressed kid's socks. Our eyes popped when forty cents in dimes fell out of the sock into her palm.

"Did you give Junior just one dime?" she asked.

"We—uh—I did, yes'm," Shorty grunted.

She smiled. "Then he didn't swallow it," Mrs. Renwick told us. "He had thirty cents when I left him with you, and now he has forty."

"You mean he put it in his sock?" I asked her.

"Yes; Mr. Renwick—he's Scotch, you know—wanted the children to learn thrift from the outset. One of the first things he taught the babies was to save any coins given to them. He taught Junior to put dimes and nickels in his sock until they could be put in his savings bank. Junior already has two hundred and fifty dollars out at six per cent. His brother, Bruce, two and a half years old, has three hundred and twenty-five dollars invested in first mortgage six per cent gold notes.

"I'm certainly sorry to have caused you so much trouble, Mr. Nolan, and I surely thank you for taking care of the baby. That little taste of tobacco won't hurt him. A little milk of magnesia and he'll be all right—— Thank the gentleman for the dime, Junior."

"Ga!" said little Angus.

A few days later Shorty Nolan got three bills, totaling twenty-one dollars, from Doctors Richter, Hesselmann, and Kitchell, for professional services. Doc Kitchell inclosed this note:

DEAR MR. NOLAN: When we submitted our statements to Mr. Renwick, father of the child we examined, he informed us that there was nothing wrong with his infant and that not he but you had called for us. It is at his suggestion, therefore, that we are sending our bills to you.

Respectfully,
(Signed) THOS. D. KITCHELL.

"Gee," sighed Shorty, as he finished the note and looked at the bills again, "if that youngster should ever make a mistake and swallow a dime, they won't have to call in no doctors! If he's got a dime in him, his old man, if any one, can get it out of him."

Kyack Kearney

By George Gilbert

Author of "Tenderfoot and Iron Man," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A FAST GUN.

HAZING his band of equine odds and ends toward Antelope, "Kyack" Kearney lolled in the saddle. His buckskin stud knew what was wanted. As long as the driven horses kept going, with that shifting, sometimes hesitant, progress that a bunch of hazed animals affects, Goldie did not vary his own rhythmic shuffle. But if one of the driven nags evinced a disposition to work offside too far, or to lead others astray, thus showing that the beginnings of a revolt were at hand, Goldie promptly got between the rebel or rebels and the back trail and rounded them up. All this without urging from his master, who took such little *pasears* as part of the game of getting his salable stock from where he had been to where he was going.

The man himself was, at first glance, merely another of the wanderers of the wastelands. His broad-brimmed hat sagged limply about his face, the rim flapping in time to the shuffle of the buckskin stud. His broad shoulders were encased in an ample gray worsted coat, under which was a gray flannel shirt, and his trousers were a faded blue. His boots were well worn but very high of heel. His spurs and all his other riding equipment were without ornament. No gun bobbed at his hip, and no belt with shiny shells circled his figure. His hands, long and strong, were in nice-fitting thin gloves. His eyes were a very light blue, his hair a golden yellow, falling over his brow rather raggedly. He was clean-shaven. His eyes were wide-spaced, calm, and his nose like that of an eagle, rather harsh in contour. Out of the saddle, one could estimate, he would stand so tall that he could look well over the heads of most men. Behind his cantle was tied a coat, rolled tightly, and at his neck a flaring red silk cloth fluttered, the sole

badge of a streak of vanity. He carried himself negligently now, and with reason, for Goldie was in command of the cavalcade of nags, and he was not near a town. His face seemed open, guileless—that of a trusting, even-tempered man.

Behind, patiently shuffling along, was a pack horse, with a kyack in place, and the kyack seemed to ride light on him, as if it was not filled with heavy things.

Kyack Kearney turned in the saddle and looked back at the shuffling pack horse with a smile of indulgent amusement.

"You ain't got a load like you carried in the old days when you was my pack hoss on the Jacarillas, Old Packer," he spoke aloud, after the manner of his outland kind. "Shack along the'e, old-timer."

Old Packer merely switched his frayed tail and kept to his task of toting the well-worn kyack. He was a faded, moth-eaten animal, with lack-lustre eyes, four white stockings, and a star on his forehead. His sole ambition in life seemed to be to tote that kyack and keep close to the horse his master was riding.

"Dawg-goned old rat, you," Kyack Kearney said to him affectionately; "good in your day and age, but getting mighty ancient."

Old Packer shook his head and slopped his tail against his sides and jogged along.

One of the hazed nags whickered and the band took up the welcome to another horse approaching. Kyack Kearney turned in his saddle and saw the approaching caballero. He was coming fast, riding as one at home in the saddle. His horse was hot blood, that was plain. The lean barrel, the proud neck, the mincing gait that he maintained even while trotting swiftly, told of the finished product of breeding and training.

The newcomer drew up alongside Kyack Kearney and spoke:

"Howdy!"

"Howdy, sir," returned Kyack, quietly observant.

"Bound for Antelope?"

"Thereabouts, sir."

This second use of the precise word "sir" had its effect. The newcomer chilled in manner at once. His hat brim was drawn low, his eyes dark under their pent arches of deepest black. A mustache, waxed and well trimmed made a straight line across his face. Otherwise, he was clean-shaven. Unlike Kyack, every bit of clothing, horse-gear and equipment was of the finest and newest, even to the pearl-handled gun that was at his right hip.

And the bay horse of the man was like everything else he had, in good order. The tail of the horse was done up in silvered rings that kept the hair in a neat club which the horse kept slightly elevated, twitching it as he jogged. His hoofs were fitted with silver-steel shoes that glinted in the sunlight.

Altogether, horse and man presented a contrast to Kyack, Goldie, Old Packer, and the cavalcade of nags.

"It strikes me," said the "pretty man," and now the dark eyes flashed a challenge, "that you're not far from a fool."

"About ten feet, sir," Kyack drawled.

The newcomer gave a start in his saddle that set the handsome bay to prancing. Then he controlled the animal with a touch of rein.

"You're too danged polite," savagely he said.

"I'm not to blame; it's the way I was fotched up, sir," said Kyack evenly.

"I may see you in Antelope."

"I'm seein' you, sir, right now, and also callin' whatever you've got, sir."

The man's hand started for the butt of the pearl-handled gun. From somewhere Kyack produced a long .45.

"I got a six full of lead. What yo' got, sir?"

The hand that had started toward

that pearl handle fell away. The dark eyes bulged with terror; the clean-shaven face with its high color turned sickly green, as the dude looked at Death thus suddenly. Kyack began to talk evenly:

"You ain't got a thing in yo'r hand. Events have moved too fast for yo', sir. Now, split the wind, muy pronto."

"I wasn't going for my gun; I only wanted to get some tobacco." The dark eyes roved from side to side like those of a caged wolf.

"Good thing to carry your eating and burnin' terbac in your front pocket, where going for it won't raise no suspections against any move toward it, sir."

The man started his bay and loped away. Kyack Kearney's gun disappeared like magic. The dude passed the huddled horses of Kyack's band and was gone over the next roll of land. Kyack spoke to Goldie and he started for the bunch of nags. The steady *rat-tat-tat* of Old Packer came in Goldie's immediate rear. In a moment the stock in trade of Kyack Kearney was again on its peaceful way toward Antelope. Kyack himself indulged anew in lollings in the saddle, certain that Goldie would keep the hazed stock on the move and always toward the goal that his master wished. Kyack confided his troubles to Goldie from time to time, or turned and talked to Old Packer.

"Now, why did I rile that hombre? Never saw him before, nor he me, so far's I savvy. Came natural, I guess. Was it because he's so pretty got-up? I'm not a sight for a fashion-plate maker, my ownse'f, Goldie. Nor are yo', Old Packer. We're just folks, workin', maybe a bit dirtied up from the long trail we've come from Alamanzo since last month. But I'll say that that nice-lookin' hombre sure worked on my anti-mines, like. I didn't like him, and he didn't like me. I didn't notice either Goldie nor Old Packer making any love signs at his hoss, either. Danged nice hoss, too! Almost a solid bay, except for that star on his forehaid, and some goer-for-fair. Well, we'll most likely not see him again. I hope so. We're not lookin' for trouble, but if trouble looks for us, let trouble look out for itse'f, we says, old-timers."

Goldie snorted and made a little *pasear*. Old Packer switched his meager tail, but continued his steady *jog-jog-jog,* and the old and worn kyack on his back kept time to his going.

Two miles outside of Antelope town Kearney came to an old corral off to one side of trail half a mile, on a little grassed flat. A shack was there. He rode toward it and the caviya needed no urging. The horses began to graze. A man, old and grizzled, came out of the shack. Kearney hailed:

"Old-timer, can I pen my *cuitans* with you while I go to town and see if I can arrange for a livery barn or corral there to use for a selling station? I'm new in this region and want to wise up on conditions before I drive close to town with those ponies."

"Sure; that's my grass and c'ral. Let 'em eat hearty and light down yourse'f. My name's Bossom, Eager Bossom."

"I'm Kyack Kearney. Hoss-trader's my name and nation now."

"Bet 't wasn't always, waddy."

"I'll pay you whatever that grass is worth."

"It ain't wo'th a cent. I don't keep cattle no more, just livin' by myself. Glad of a bit of company. Pen up those nags and I'll keep an eye on them. I got a girl in town, Elsa, works in Miss Capen's eatin' bar. If you see her, tell her her pappy's all right."

"I'll see her, sure. And be back before sundown."

"Camp here to-night."

"Thanks. I'll skin that kyack off Old Packer and then Goldie and I will

haze those hosses into that pen, if you'll watch at the gate."

"No sooner said than done, waddy."

Half an hour later Kyack Kearney rode toward Antelope, leaving his stock in the corral. The horses had been grazed a bit, enough to keep them satisfied for the time. They had nipped along the way all day and did not need as much as a night-camp feeding.

Freed of his responsibilities, Kearney let Goldie jog as he would. He came to Antelope well toward the shank of the day. He paused to look the town over from the top of the last roll of land before descending. It was just an old trail center, changed into a mercantile resort through frontier evolution. The false fronts on the stores, the wide street, the little plaza, were like dozens of others in every county.

CHAPTER II.

A COWBOY TEMPTED.

NOW, Kearney let Goldie mince down the slope and into the town. He found the eating-bar of Miss Capen speedily, and entered, leaving Goldie at the hitch rail. The place was clean. A tall, slim, easy-mannered woman came to wait on him. Her voice was soft and pleasant to hear. Her hands were deft. Kearney had been inclined to stand up at the short-order counter, but he forgot this inclination as soon as the tall, slim spinster pulled out a chair for him at the table. There was no other customer in the place just then. Kearney gave a generous order, for he was tired of his own cooking. Ham and eggs, pie, coffee, French fried. All of them were to be had. Kearney ate appreciatively and eyed aslant the girl who brought the food on a tray on which was a clean white napkin. Miss Capen was in the kitchen, cooking now.

"You are Elsa Bossom?" Kearney asked.

"Yes, sir," the waitress said shyly. She was blond, quiet, clean.

"I stopped at your place, left some horses there. I'm to sleep there to-night. Your dad said to tell you he was all right."

At once she became a smiling, pleasant girl.

"Oh, thank you. I work here, and dad lives out there alone. He doesn't care much where he is now that mother's gone. There was nothing for me out there, so I came into town. If you're going back there to-night, would you take back a package for me, some shirts I've mended for him?"

"Nothing would please me better. My name's Kearney, John Henry to be exact, but my friends call me Kyack."

"Thanks, Kyack."

He ate appreciatively, ordered again, took even a third cup of coffee. Elsa, behind the bar, watched smilingly. Kyack said emphatically:

"Any one that can make coffee like that deserves a monument."

The slim spinster, who had emerged from the inner regions, laughed a little and Kearney turned a calm eye on her as he drew out his money. He paid the score and bought a cigar. The spinster disappeared. Elsa watched Kearney light up. She had something to say, but evidently found it hard to speak.

Kearney, sensing this embarrassment, tarried.

"You are new here?" Elsa ventured.

"Yes, just locating for a spell of hoss trading, dickering, and buying. Is that corral I passed on the edge of town in use much?"

"Only a few weeks out of the year. You can see the owner, Mart Edwards, at the Golden Bough any time." The girl spoke with a certain accent of displeasure.

"He hang out there?"

"He owns it. He's a gambler."

"Oh, that's it?"

"Yes. And, Mr. Kearney——"

"Kyack."

"Kyack, there's a young cowboy hanging out with Edwards. He eats here. Name is 'Cheerful' Cullins."

"Yes?"

"He came looking for work. He had some money. They've got him broke. He's too nice a boy to get going wrong, as he will if he stays with that Golden Bough crowd."

"What can I do? He's of age, ain't he?"

"Yes, but——"

The girl's fingers were interlaced. Her face was appealing. Altogether an irresistible Elsa she was now. Kearney spoke rather gruffly:

"Well, I'll see. But I don't like hornin' in on another man's game."

"Oh, thank you," and now she was radiant.

Kearney went out, smoking rather savagely. As he left the place Miss Capen emerged and transfixed the radiant Elsa with her calm, blue-gray eyes.

"And you never saw that man before! How could you speak so confidentially to him of a sudden?" she asked.

"Oh, he and dad are friends," replied Elsa, conscious of how much of a half-truth this was, and therefore the more confused.

"Oh, that is different!"

Kearney left Goldie right where he was. He strolled down the street, remembering where he had seen the sign of the Golden Bough. It had a golden-yellow front. The light was fading now. Large windows showed a room that ran across the front of the place, a reading room. Doors opened from this back into the main room of the resort, where all sorts of games of chance were running.

At the main bar several men lounged. One Kyack knew for the dude who had passed him on the trail, riding that hot-blood bay. He was talking to a young cowboy, who was shaking his head. The dude had not noticed Kyack's entry as yet. He said to the young cowboy:

"Come, have a drink with us."

"I don't drink. But if I don't drink with you, that don't mean that I'm not friendly, Mr. Edwards."

"Prove it, then, by drinking with us. A man that's friendly with another man will drink with him."

"I'm under a promise, Mr. Edwards."

"I suppose to your dear old mama?"

"Well, yes," and now the cowboy's voice had another ring in it. This was met with a burst of laughter from the dude's companions.

"Come, drink, this once, Cullins. A man that won't drink with a man isn't his friend."

"I won't drink."

"That's equal to an insult."

"I cain't he'p that."

"I'll make you drink." Now Edwards' hands was at his hip suddenly.

The cowboy paled, but remained firm. "I ain't got a gun and you-all know it," he said. "I done lost my outfit gamblin' in he'e, and I'm broke. But I'm not a coward."

"You'll drink with us——"

The gambler's hand touched the butt of the pearl-mounted gun. The young cowboy shook his head.

"Cullins." Kyack spoke quietly.

Cullins wheeled. So did Edwards and his pals at the bar.

"I've got a job of work for you, cowboy," said Kyack.

"What you hornin' in here for?" Edwards demanded.

"I wasn't talkin' at yo'-all, sir."

An edge of menace had crept into the horse-trader's tones. Edwards' hand was still at his hip.

"I aim to be in this man's town quite a spell," said Kyack, "and any one that wants me can find me. Edwards, you own that corral at the edge of town. I want a place to keep my hosses. Is that place for rent?"

A change went over the gambler's face. He smiled.

"Why, yes," he said.

"I'll take it for three months. I aim to buy, swap, and sell horses here. Does water go with that corral?"

"There are troughs, and a pump. Water's a mite brackish, but all right."

"Jot down a lease. My name's John Henry Kearney. Kyack for short."

Edwards asked the barkeeper for a pad and wrote a short-term lease. He handed this to Kyack, who noted the amount needed and proceeded to expose a roll of yellow-backed bills that made Edwards' eyes dance. Kyack handed him the needed amount, and said quickly:

"I hope we have good business relations, Mr. Edwards."

"Yes. Drink?"

"No, not any, thank you, sir."

Turning on his heel, Kyack walked out, with the young cowboy at his heels. As he left, a buzz of talk followed him. Edwards spoke quietly:

"He's got money. I'd rather break a man like that than fight him. He's a fool, headstrong, touchy. I'll break him, and then—well, let me finish it this way——" and he tapped the butt of his fancy gun.

"Long haid on you, Mart," a thin-faced, sallow man said admiringly; "he'll rake in money for you and drop it all before he leaves."

"I'm going to rib him up for a quarter-hoss race. He fancies that buckskin hoss of his a lot, I could see when I passed him on the trail coming in to-day. If I can get him to a race, we can skin him. I never saw one of those hoss-traders yet that wouldn't take a chance. They're most always broke playin' some other man's game."

"Which you never do, Edwards," the sallow man said.

"No, Worson, I don't."

And they all laughed.

"I'll get friendly with him, to draw him on. You-all act nice to him. Here, Derby," said Edward addressing a somewhat bowed, thin man, "you've had a falling out here. You go and complain against me to Kearney."

"Like I did to that young cowboy till we had him broke?"

"Same way." Then Edwards began to lay out parts for several of his hangers-on to play.

"I'll watch him and bait him on and work up some kind of a bet that will break him," Edwards said bitterly; "he'll be a nuisance around here. But we might as well get all his money before he goes."

They all laughed at this and addressed admiring phrases to Edwards.

CHAPTER III.

AN OPEN FACE.

AFTER leaving the Golden Bough, Cheerful and Kyack walked up the street quickly. Before Miss Capen's eating-bar they paused. Elsa was at the door, smiling.

"I've hired this young fellow to do a job of work for me," Kyack told her; "he may not be wo'th much, but I'll take a chance on him."

"I think Mr. Cullins will be all right," Elsa ventured.

"Thanks for the recommend, Miss Bossom," Cheerful said, and now he was eager and hurried in his talk. "I'll do my best to make good and get an outfit of my own again. A walkin' man is no good in the cow country, I know, and that's what I am now."

A shade of sadness went over Elsa's face.

"I done played stud poker again with Worson. He won my hoss and ridin' outfit and—my gun." This last was said with a gulp.

"Stay with Kyack and you'll come out all right," advised the girl, and then she went in.

"I'll lend you a hoss and you can

work it out. My caviya is about two mile out of town, at Bossom's place," said Kyack.

"I savvy that. I'll walk it."

"No, ride pillion with me. Goldie will carry double nicely."

Kyack made ready to mount. Cullins held back. Kyack eyed him shrewdly and then asked: "Anything else?"

"I owe money to Miss Capen."

Kyack drew out a bill. "Go pay it and I'll let you work that out, too," he said.

A warm flush of gratitude went over the youngster's face. He went into the eating-bar and emerged soon, giving Kyack the change. Then they rode away together. Early sundown found them at the Bossom place.

Here they found old Bossom waiting for them, with his fire going. Kearney and he threw in together for the evening meal, cooked in the open. The horses all cared for, Bossom settled down on a blanket and began to gossip with Kearney, who steered the talk around to the mistress of the eating-bar.

"Oh, yeah, Miss Capen! Sister of a rancher thet died a spell back. Kept house for him. Bill Capen. All tall folks, those Capens, too. She's six fut if she's an inch. Makes me nervous, she so dawg-gone clean, but Elsa likes her. She took what li'le money her brother Bill left her and started that eating-bar. I guess she gits a bid to marry every week, but she says a good eating-bar beats a husband any day as a provider. Says she can sell grub to a hundred customers a day at a profit, and maybe one as a husband would never pay a cent."

With the dawn Kyack was up, and he found Cullins already afoot. Bossom came out of his shack. From him Kyack bought a used saddle. He had a bridle in his pack and a serviceable old frontier-six, .45 caliber. Thus Cullins was fitted out, on credit to Kyack, and given a Roman-nosed black horse. "If you can ride him," Kyack commented.

After quite an argument it was proved that Cullins could stay on the Roman-nosed bucker, which raised him somewhat in Kyack's opinion. Soon they started for town.

"I'll haze these hosses," Cullins offered.

"Stay with me; Goldie will do it."

So they rode together. Old Packer jogged behind them, snorting and switching his frayed tail whenever Kyack addressed him.

"He's a knowin' old cuss," Cullins ventured.

"Old Packer sure is long on savvy. He went with me all through those Jacarillas, when I was prospecting years back, and I've always kept him. He's an Indian pony. I won him."

"What at?"

"Oh, a game of chance! I hope yo're through with them?"

"Unless I know who I'm playin' with. I begin to suspect that I was just plain side-meat for those tinhorns in Antelope."

"Hardly that; yo'r face is built too much like an open-face watch to make yo' money at cards. Say, is there a chance to get into hoss deals in that man's town?"

"It's quite a center for ranch trade."

"I'll risk it. I'm new in this country. Where I came from modern inconveniences crept in too much and killed the hoss business."

CHAPTER IV.

KYACK BLOWS UP.

"PRETTY wild in here yet, different than back in Texas where I was raised," volunteered Cheerful.

"I suppose yo're like a lot of other romancin' kids, out this way to see all the sights west of the big mountains?"

Cullins laughed a bit and then was silent for a time. Kyack broke this silence.

"See that young jack rabbit. He's our meat. Le's see yo' shoot him."

Cullins whipped over his old gun. The ball started the rabbit to running like a streak. Kyack's gun spoke. The rabbit flipped out straight, end-for-end, and was still.

"I call that shootin'," said Cullins admiringly.

"That was slow, for me. I let him get out a ways so that big slug wouldn't tear him apart by hitting him when he was all bunched up. I caught him as he was on the top of his jump, and his haid ought to be hit."

Cullins started his mount toward the rabbit, leaned over in the saddle and got him easily. He looked at his prize. The ball had clipped off the top of the jack's head.

"Put him on top of Old Packer's pack; I know a way to cook a young jack that will make your mouth water, Cullins."

"Then you'll be cooking our own grub?"

"We'll eat at Miss Capen's some, if that's what yo're hintin' at, Cheerful."

Cheerful grinned widely.

"Oh, I don't blame yo' for wantin' to go there. She's a dazzler, that girl is, Cheerful. If I was ten years younger, and had an open face, and curly brown hair, and nice light-brown eyes, I might shy in a bet or two on that Bossom girl, too. She ought t've been named Blossom."

"I made good friends with her, first. But when I kept going with that Edwards gang, she froze up on me."

"Yo' don't blame her, honest, now?"

"No, she showed sense in turning away from a man that was bound to string along with that crowd. I don't know how I came to do it. Sort of reckless, I reckon, after losing my money at cards. Ever play?"

"I've taken a chance at almost anything in my time," said Kyack dryly. "Say, when Edwards rode into town, did he mention that he had had a run-in with a man on the trail in?"

"No; I was in the Golden Bough all the time, from when he got in till you got me out of that jack pot."

"Why was he so anxious for yo' to drink with him?"

"No savvy that. He'd been offering hints on big money if I'd go in with them on some risky business, but he never hinted right out what it was. He said he wouldn't take me in unless I drank with them on it."

"I reckon if yo'd gone in with them, they'd used yo' as a sucker, or sawed something off onto yo', Cheerful."

"I'm beginning to think that a way myse'f, Kyack."

"Does Edwards really stand as big wolf in town?"

"Every one credits him with it. The town's not organized with a full set of officials. A deputy from Tumencario rides in once in a while, hardly ever a ranger, they tell me. Pretty out of the way, Antelope is."

Now they were close to town. Kyack rode forward to inspect the corral he had rented from Edwards. He found the pump working. He had the old troughs scrubbed out when Cheerful arrived with the horses and they penned them. From Old Packer's burden Kyack took a small tent and cooking utensils. They set up the tent on a knoll overlooking the corral. Kyack surveyed these arrangements with satisfaction:

"I'll rustle some old gunny bags, split them, and make an awning of them, set up on sticks nailed to that fence, for shade for those nags, and then we'll be set. Here come visitors!"

Two men were approaching, Edwards and Worson. They strolled up, smiling. Edwards greeted Kyack cordially:

"So you've taken possession? That's

right. If there's anything needed, let me know."

"Thanks."

"Welcome, I'm sure. Say, any of those hosses in your string know what a quarter of a mile is?"

"Why, some of them can go."

"We enjoy a quarter race in Antelope amazin' well at times."

"I fancy such myse'f, when I'm in the mood. I suppose that bay of yours can go some?"

"Well, he's won me some money. I won't deny that a hoss that beats him in a short race will travel some."

"I didn't really think he could go," said Kyack, belittling the other man's horse.

"Didn't, eh?" and now Edwards was showing some heat. "I'm willing to back him."

"Oh," Kyack exploded fiercely, "that bay is too finicky to run a short race. He's too long-coupled. Takes a short, nippy hoss to win a real short race. That bay looks tender to me."

"Tender, my foot!" Edwards stormed, shaking his fist. "He's fast enough to carry my money."

"Who's to ride him?" Kyack asked cannily.

"I've got a li'le Mex lad that can do that."

"Say, Cheerful, could you ride a short race?" Kyack asked.

"I can stick on anything that long," said Cheerful, becoming very animated at the prospect of getting into the squabble in person.

Edwards gazed at Cheerful steadfastly. Worson whispered something to Edwards, who demanded.

"You two never met before coming here? This isn't a scheme to get me and my bay up against a professional rider and regular race-hoss?"

"I never saw this boy before I came here, and I've only got ordinary hoss-flesh at my command," Kyack replied earnestly. "Now, I'll back what I've got against what yo've got. Nothing could be fairer than that, you must admit."

Edwards walked around, hands in pockets, gazing through the corral bars. Goldie, head down, was at the edge of the bunch of penned horses.

While they had been talking, several men had sauntered up from town. Kyack noted they were all men he had seen in Edwards' place the day before. Edwards pointed at the golden buckskin:

"I suppose you fancy that ornery nag of yours?"

"I like him some, I'll admit," firmly said Kyack.

"Well, he doesn't look to me. I don't think he can go much."

"And I hold that same idea about your bay."

"Well, then put up something to back your opinion. Mouth bets don't mean anything."

"I know that. Well, maybe I'll not do anything then."

"Backin' down, eh?" Edwards spoke loudly now. "Crawlin' a bit? I thought you'd weaken when it came to a show-down."

Edwards snapped his fingers under the hawklike nose of Kyack and glared at him provokingly.

"Welching out, eh?" he repeated. "I've said that in a pinch you wouldn't come through."

Kyack's lips drew back; he clenched and unclenched his big hands. His voice took on a bull note that was impressive:

"I'll not be talked to like that! I'm not afraid of that hot-blood fake you ride around the country, Edwards. Anything I've got that wears a saddle can beat him."

Edwards' eyes flashed with elation. He turned to the men of the small crowd and spoke quietly:

"Hear that? He says he'll race my bay, Alazan, against anything he's got

that has worn a saddle. Distance a quarter. Is that right?"

This last query was addressed to Kyack Kearney, who was glaring at Edwards.

"That's what I said," said Kyack, waving his big hands excitedly; "and what I say, I mean. Anything I've got that's worn a saddle can beat your hot-blood bay. Look 'em over. I'd be almost afraid to start my Goldie against such a goat as that bay is. I've got hosses in my string, fresh off the open range, just broke, that can beat your ornery bay."

Edwards looked over the horses of the trading outfit with disdainful eye.

"Kearney, you've gone wild!" he said contemptuously. "I call on these men to witness what you've said."

"They can witness or not; I stick to what I've said." Kearney spoke angrily.

"That you'll back anything you have that's worn a saddle against my bay for a quarter-race?" Edwards said slowly and distinctly.

"That's just it."

"Well, for how much?"

"For anything you say," fiercely retorted Kyack.

"That's indefinite. Come down to earth."

"Be quick, and name your own figure, Edwards. I'd like to nick your roll mighty sudden and mighty deep."

"Is that so, Kearney?" Edwards asked derisively. "Well, put it in writing, then. Name a specified amount."

"You write out your own agreement and show it to me."

"You mean that?"

"Sure, get it down, quick!" Now Kearney's voice was choked with emotion.

Edwards took out of his inner pocket a pad and pencil, leaned against the corral bars, and began to jot down some lines. He pointed out Goldie to Worson and some other of his friends, and they laughed. Kearney walked back and forth, furious, emitting hectic phrases every now and then. He defied Edwards and his friends, reiterated his willingness to race anything he had against Edwards' bay.

As Edwards finished writing the terms of the race, Worson remarked quietly:

"He'll quit on this; he'll never sign it."

"Who said I wouldn't?" Kyack stormed, hastening to where the Edwards group was looking at the written sheet on the tablet that Edwards held. "I'll sign it soon enough. Just tell me how much it's for, what the bet is, and that will end it all with me."

At this point a thin man, somewhat bowed, hastened up and spoke to Kyack nervously.

"Howdy, stranger! Don't let them rim up a race against that bay. He's a regular runner, and has won a lot of races here."

"You get away from here," Edwards commented, shoving the man back vigorously, "this isn't your game, a-tall."

"I protest——" the man began.

Worson seized him by the collar and shoved him back so hard that he fell flat. He got up, dusted off his clothing, and retired, shaking his fist at Edwards and his friends.

"Derby's getting to be a pest," Edwards said; "he's against all horse races and tries to break up every one we have."

"He cain't bust up this one," Kyack stormed at them. "Get that memorandum of the race ready."

"Here it is," Edwards said, shoving it under his nose.

Cheerful peered at it. He whispered to Kyack:

"It's for one thousand dollars! Don't sign in a hurry, boss."

"I don't care," Kyack replied; "a thousand or more, it makes no diff of bitterance to me. I'm a game man, I

am! You-all have taunted me about welching and all such mean things. I'll bet you till you're tired of counting out the money. I'll sign this, I'll sign——"

"Then do it; mouth bets don't count," Edwards insisted.

"No, they don't. You talk to me like a man that's ready to quit," said Worson, trying to tantalize Kyack further.

"I do, eh? Where's that pencil?"

He seized it and signed with a flourish, handing the agreement back to Edwards. Edwards signed it hastily. Then he read it aloud:

"First: A race is agreed to, between Kyack Kearney and Mart Edwards, distance a quarter of a mile. Purse, two thousand dollars, one half to be put up by each.

"Second: The race to be run on the flat below Antelope, over the quarter course used for racing at this town. The race to be run next Saturday.

"Third: The jockeys to be picked by the respective owners of the two horses in the race.

"Fourth: Starter, timers, and judge at the finish to be mutually agreeable to both parties before the race.

"Fifth: The horses to race are Edwards' bay, Alazan, and——"

Here Edwards paused impressively and smiled.

"Remember what you said, Kyack—that you'd race anything you had that had worn a saddle against my bay?"

"I said it, and I stick to it," Kyack retorted hotly.

"It ain't too late yet," Cheerful whispered to Kyack, "to draw back."

"You shut up, boy. My name is pledged and I'll keep my agreement," Kyack insisted.

From the outskirts of the crowd, Derby entered a final protest:

"Don't let them fool you, stranger. That's a hot-blood, that bay is. He's a reg'lar professional hoss——"

"Chase that anti-race crank away! He tries to stop every race we try to get up," Edwards ordered.

Some one chased Derby back toward town, while Edwards turned again to the pad, with its written agreement.

"Who will we have for stakeholder?" Kyack interrupted.

"Any one you say," Edwards replied exultantly; "I'm not worrying over that."

Just then old Bossom came jogging up, elbows out, body bobbing stiffly as he straddled a long-legged mule.

"What's going on here?" he asked.

"Lining out a race," some one said.

"I'd like Mr. Bossom to hold the stakes and be judge at the finish," Kyack said falteringly.

"Every one knows Bossom is O. K.," Edwards replied; "so I agree, and that ought to give me the starter."

"Sure, any one you say," Kyack answered.

"Worson, then," said Edwards tauntingly.

"All right," said Kyack.

CHAPTER V.

OLD PACKER!

WHEN old Bossom had been informed of the details already arranged, Edwards, who had been waiting impatiently, again addressed Kyack:

"You abide by all the conditions as stated and expressed in this agreement that you've signed?"

"I've already said I did," retorted Kyack.

"Then I'll complete the reading of section fifth," said Edwards.

"Finish it; it don't worry me, not none."

"All right, then, folks, just listen."

Edwards cleared his throat impressively and read the fifth clause of the race agreement with great gusto:

"Fifth: The horses to race are Edwards' bay, Alazan, and the pack horse, grulla colored, owned by Kyack Kearney."

"What!" bellowed Kyack, his eye blazing. "Me race my li'le old pack-

hoss, Old Packer, against that hot-blood, professional running hoss?"

A roar of delighted laughter went up from the crowd.

"You agreed, in writing, to put up one thousand dollars on it, and to pit against my bay hoss anything you had that had worn a saddle," said Edwards triumphantly.

"Yes, but a pack hoss!"

"He wears a pack saddle, doesn't he?"

"Yes; but, gentlemen, I didn't think you'd pick him, an old, worn, pack hoss! Why, folks——" and Kyack's voice broke with emotion.

"You've signed it, and you'll keep it or be hooted out of town as a welcher," Edwards said fiercely.

"That's it; put up or shut up," Worson echoed his chief.

"What did I tell you?" Derby called from the edge of the group.

"Run that meddler out again," Edwards roared.

"I don't think you're required to comply with any catch-word agreement like that," old Bossom interposed from the back of his mule.

"This is between him and me," Edwards insisted.

"Well, all right," Kyack said despairingly. "I'll go through with it. This is what comes of shooting off a man's mouth reckless. I'm hooked, and I might's well go through."

He drew out a huge roll of yellow bills and counted out to Bossom one thousand dollars. Edwards at once covered this, and laughed heartily as he did so.

"It isn't every day a sucker comes to town, and when one does, I like to hook him, good and deep." Edwards gleefully rubbed salt into Kyack's wounds.

"I'll admit that I said too much," said Kyack, with tight lips. "I'll keep a mum mouth from now on. Talkin' wild costs too much money."

Edwards and his friends strolled away, laughing and rejoicing, after the stake money and the written agreement had been handed to old Bossom. The Edwards crowd went into the Golden Bough, while "Pink" Derby slunk down behind the buildings and joined them by going in at the rear door. Once Edwards saw him, he began to praise Derby for his skill in deception.

"I've thought of another scheme, too," Derby told them, "that will keep him coming along. Nothing like a li'le ray of hope to keep a sucker coming toward the bait."

"What is it?" Edwards asked.

"I'm not telling."

"Old mysterious, eh! Well, all have something moist on me, boys. I've rented that old corral and water to this Kyack Kearney at three prices, and I've ribbed up a race that will trim him out of a thousand bones. I noticed that he had more money left, too. There won't be any betting on this race, because no one will bet on that broken-down old pack hoss against my bay. If he had had a chance to start that buckskin of his against my Alazan, it might have been different. But that stiff-laigged old pack hoss sure will be a joke."

"How about old Bossom as stakeholder?" Worson asked.

"That's another joke. If Alazan should fall daid on the track, and that pack hoss win by a fluke, old Bossom couldn't get away on that spavined mule of his. In such a case, the only chance against us, we'd make Bossom shell out the money and declare it no race. Maybe we'd keep it all. Depends on what turns up. I wouldn't want to put over too raw a deal, and get that newcomer the sympathy of the rank and file of folks here, because we've got bigger things than hoss races as our real game here."

"No, the average folks here don't bother with us and won't as long as we run things easy," Worson agreed with his chief. "There are enough of them

to make it hot for us if they ever got altogether awake."

"This race is taken as a joke by every one, and a joke on the new man," Edwards said exultantly; "and it will make this Kyack Kearney out a sucker, and no sucker ever got public esteem that I ever heard of! A sucker may get sympathy from a few, but most people are glad to laugh at one. Say, Derby, what is that new scheme of yours to keep Kyack coming?"

"Mum's the word, boss," and he went out with a final gesture of mystery.

"Old Derby's taking himself seriously, boys. He seems to enjoy acting his li'le part."

"He wouldn't double cross us, would he?" Worson asked.

Edwards' eyes flashed. "Not Pink Derby; he knows that I know one thing that he doesn't want a certain sheriff to know."

They laughed in unison and their laughter was like the yapping of wolves over a pile of clean-picked bones.

CHAPTER VI.

SORROW FOR KYACK.

YOUNG CULLINS had watched the Edwards crowd go with mixed emotions. Two or three of them remained, however, covertly listening. Cheerful's pity was soon struggling for first place on his boyish features. He spoke to Kyack feelingly, so feelingly that his sincerity was very evident:

"Say, Kyack, it seems that you've got nicely into a j. p. by being too trusting-like."

"I know it, boy, I know it. Now, can you ride a quarter hoss?"

Every one but Bossom had gone now. He had dismounted from his mule and stood, tucking the big roll of bills and the agreement for the race into his capacious inner coat pocket.

"Yes, I've rode short hosses in races. I'm pretty light."

"I feel sorry for you, Kyack," Bossom said sympathetically.

"So do I, when I have time. Let's go look Old Packer over."

They walked into the corral together. At once the horses began to wall back their eyes, looking for the dragging rope. But, seeing none, they contented themselves with crowding away as far as they could. Goldie came to the front and looked at his master. Kyack spoke to Old Packer, who at once left the bunch of snorting broncs and came trotting over to Kyack.

"Well, old-timer, you've got to show them what you've got," Kyack said, as he gave the horse a morsel of tobacco. "They done picked you out, and you've got to make it."

"I'd better take him out and condition him by regular exercise," Cheerful Cullins suggested.

"No, let him be; it will all come out the same. I've got myself into a bad hole, talkin' too mighty and mighty, and signing the first paper shoved under my nose. Now, Cheerful, let this be a lesson unto you. Don't ever play the other fellow's game. That's what I did. Lost my haid and bet on the other fellow's game. Let Old Packer stay in this corral. Exercising him wouldn't do much good. Let's go and look at the course where this race will be run."

"It's about half a mile below town," Cheerful told him.

"Tell me about it."

"It's just a flat place, along the benchland, about a hundred yards wide and a mile long. A half mile of it is level, nicely grassed. That gives enough room for a running start, a quarter-mile dash and room to turn and ease down your hoss at the end."

"Is the course fair for all?"

"Yes, a nice, average town quarter-course. No bad spots. Near the end is a clump of bushes, but it's off to one side, so it doesn't interfere with the races."

"Hum!" Kyack said reflectively.

"Le's go and see it," Bossom urged.

"No, I guess I won't even waste time on it. All I want is for Cheerful to ride on Old Packer, do his best, and give the people a race to look at, and get it over. Cheerful, how do you ride?"

"Pretty deep in the saddle. I'm not for any fancy stuff. I try to ease myself on my toes at the finish."

"Old Packer's been used to carrying loads that sog right onto his back."

"Will he go with a rider on him? I've known pack hosses that would buck a man off and die rather than carry anything but a pack," old Bossom said.

"So've I. Well, Old Packer will carry a man. I've often rode him to water and like that. I've rode him when Goldie was saddle-weary, too. He'll stand for roping off him and shooting, too. But against a hot-blood bay—— Well, well, well"—Kyack walked around shaking his head dubiously—"what a fool a man will make of himself with his tongue! What is it that St. James says about the tongue? He calls it an unruly member. Says something about the helm turning the big ship, and the tongue being like the helm, but no man can control it. I know all that now. Well, well, well!" He sighed deeply and put his hand into his pocket and continued, "And I can feel the place where one thousand dollars was not so long ago."

"If you don't want me for a moment, I'll go down the street," Cheerful suggested.

"All right, providing you go to Miss Capen's eating-bar. No use blushing over it, dawg-gone it. I'd do the same if I was fifteen years younger and had an open face, like you've got, Cheerful." Kyack fired this at that hopeful's back, as Cheerful bolted through the corral gate. As he did so, several men approached and leaned against the corral, listening.

"Say, Kyack," old Bossom asked, leaning confidently toward the horse trader, "suppose I bet something on that old crow-bait?" He pointed to Old Packer, who flicked his small ears forward and then back as a sign that he knew he was being noticed.

"Bet at your own risk, if at all," grimly advised Kyack.

One of the listeners came sidling into the corral. He took Kyack by the sleeve and drew him away from Bossom. It was Pink Derby.

"Say, mister, if I tip you off onto something, will you pay me well?" asked Pink.

"About this race?"

"Yes," said Derby, glancing apprehensively about.

"Yes, sure," eagerly agreed Kyack.

"Well, there's one blow-hole in that hot-blood bay of Edwards', and it's a big one, if you know it."

"What's that?"

"Well, near the end of our local race course there's a clump of bushes."

"Yes," eagerly.

"Have a man hid in them. Have him give the long yell as Alazan passes those bushes. Alazan is always skittish when any one yells sudden. It sets him to bucking. While he's bucking, your pack hoss can win, if he can even walk, for once Alazan begins to pitch, he doesn't run again till he's tired or has pitched his rider off the saddle."

"Thanks; here's a yellow bill. With that information, I'm going to bet, even if it is only on an old pack hoss."

Pink Derby sidled out, after expressing his thanks. The passing of the bill had been done so adroitly that none of the spectators had witnessed it, Kyack was sure.

When Derby was gone, Kyack asked Bossom about him.

"Newcomer here; been in town about a week. He seems to have some grouch on Edwards, always talks against him on the street."

"Well, I don't blame him. Say, you going toward home?"

"Yes."

"I think I'll rope out Goldie and ride a ways with you. Cheerful will be back soon to watch over these *cuitans* of mine. I want to ride to get the kinks out of my back."

"Be glad of your company, Kyack."

"Thanks."

In a few moments more the two were riding together toward the Bossom place and the little knot of watchers about the corral broke up. On the way back to the town's center the men talked of the coming race, and many expressions of sympathy were uttered for Kyack Kearney.

"That's what comes of a loose tongue," one solid citizen said to the others; "betting unsight-unseen, like, and signing the first paper shoved under your nose! Don't ketch me a-doin' anything like that, eh, Caswell?"

"No, Quiller, that's so. It pays to be sure, especially in a hoss race or hoss trade."

"But who can be sure in either?" asked an old fellow with long white hair and beard.

"Oh, Uncle Billy Berdan always has his joke," Caswell said, smilingly.

"And it's always a good thing to listen to him," Quiller agreed.

CHAPTER VII.

MISS CAPEN BETS.

AT the eating-bar, Cheerful Cullins dallied with a cup of seal-brown ambrosia that appeared on the bill of fare as coffee. Elsa Bossom sat across the table from him. It was the dull hour and they had the place to themselves. Cheerful finished telling of the coming race and the conditions thereof.

"Why, Cheerful, you shouldn't have let them put Mr. Kyack into such a position," Elsa protested.

"Me? I tried my best by hinting caution. But he's like a bull, when he gets a-going, Elsa. He took the ground that he'd made his boast and must go through with it."

"But it's plain robbery. And Mr. Kyack is such a good man," said Elsa earnestly.

"What's this I hear?" Miss Capen asked, as she came from behind the kitchen partition. "Kyack Kearney in a hole? Edwards put him in it? I heard what you said. You should have stopped him from making that bet."

"I gave him some hints, but he went right on," Cheerful said.

"He went right on. Bet anyway?" Miss Capen demanded.

"Yes."

"Then, depend on it, there was a reason. Mr. Kearney looks like an able-minded man, Cheerful," the spinster said. "I'm going to bet on his judgment. I've got a hundred dollars. Put it down for me on Kyack's horse, at the best odds you can get."

"But Old Packer hasn't a chance to win this race! It's an old stiff-legged pack hoss against a hot-blood bay. You know how Edwards has trimmed every one with that bay?"

"All right, let him trim. I know I'm going to lose, but bet my money for me, at any odds you can get," and now the speaker's lips were drawn to a thin line. "I don't like Edwards and his crowd, and never will. Any man that's against them, I'm for."

"But you haven't a chance," protested Cheerful.

"I don't care; bet for me. Do you hear?"

"You talk and act just like Kyack, ma'am," Cheerful said.

"Well, what if I do, you young gab-squirt?" said Miss Capen, and she marched off to the kitchen, leaving the money on the table between the two.

"What had I ought to do about this?" Cheerful indicated the roll of money to Elsa.

"I hardly know. She can't afford to lose it. She'll be mad if you don't do as she said."

"It sure looks to me like throwing it away."

"I know it. But she's just like that. She wants what she wants when she wants it, and she won't ever refer to it, if she loses."

"She'll lose it, all right, if I bet it."

"She and Kyack are a pair, both good-hearted, but swift-tempered."

"Sure, and you're good-hearted and sweet as——"

"Hush, Cheerful, don't talk that a way yet. Remember, you're only on probation, after losing all your money and outfit gambling!"

"But how about Miss Capen, gambling with her money?"

"According to your tell, she hasn't got a chance, so it's not gambling, but really throwing money away on a daid one."

"That's just what it is."

And Cheerful took the money and went out, thinking deeply.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORE SUCKER-BAIT.

AS the days passed, news of the odd race became general all through the region. Cowboys and ranchers, in to trade or for the mail, got the word and all went to the corral to view Old Packer. Kyack made some hay, however, for some of those who came to make fun of him and Old Packer remained to deal with him for some of the other horses. Several fancy offers were made for Goldie, but Kyack refused to sell the buckskin.

"If I'd matched him against Edwards' bay, it would have been different," he would say to them, shaking his head sadly; "but I got brash with my mouth and he worked me into letting him pick Old Packer as the one to race against Alazan. Pride goeth before a fall and a haughty spirit is worse than folly. When I was younger I had more sense."

Old Packer, standing there hunched up in a niche in the corral fence where the bars had buiged, was spiritless. The deep-scored marks of the kyack showed plainly that he had carried the pack for a long time. One keen-eyed old rancher said to Kyack Kearney:

"He's carried a saddle some?"

"My boy's exercising him once in a while, but, shucks! That's nothing to signify. I've rode him some, too, when my Goldie was rode down fine. But not to speak of."

"You sure deserve sympathy, if a dolt ever does," the old rancher observed, as he strolled away chewing a straw.

"Don't rub it in, uncle," Kyack pleaded.

As for Cheerful, he carried Miss Capen's one hundred dollars in an inside pocket, often debating with himself whether to wager it or not. He ventured at first an inquiry as to whether any one would give him odds, and was at once surrounded by men on the street eager to give him any odds he named. But he put away the money mournfully:

"Nope, I don't want to lose this money. It's a friend's."

Miss Capen did not refer to the one hundred dollars again, but Elsa did, and finally she told him to bet the money, as Miss Capen was bound to put it up to back up her hastily formed judgment.

With that strong hint, Cheerful went to bet the money but could not bring himself to lay it down, arguing silently that delay would not hurt any one.

Old Bossom was in and out of town, subject to jests as to the possibility of his "sloping out with that stake money," the usual reward of the honest money-keeper in an amateur sporting event. Men in front of the Golden Bough renewed these jests as Bossom passed the place.

"I'll be right on hand, dawg-gone it," he protested, "right on my mu-el, right at that finish line! I'll declare the winner honest and pay over that two thousand dollars to who wins it rightfully."

"Of course, 'Pop,'" Edwards remarked genially; "you'll do just that. We know Pop can be trusted."

"There's some that cain't, though," old Bossom declared.

"Oh, yes, but they don't last," Edwards returned.

Bossom went to get onto his spavined mule. As he rode out of town, Pink Derby sidled into the crowd and made a mysterious motion to Edwards, who followed him into the gambling joint. Derby drew the gambler into a corner and whispered to him:

"It's going like wildfire. The average folks are getting to a point where they'll bet. I've spread it all around that Kyack is to have a man hid in that clump of bushes near the end of the race course to jump up and give the long yell as your Alazan passes, and that is supposed to throw Alazan into a bucking fit and make him lose the race. I've tipped them that Alazan cain't stand being yelled at. Kyack Kearney has swallowed it, hook, line, and sinker. I'll bet you can get him to bet on that old pack hoss, if you go at him right and offer him odds enough."

"Say, that's your surprise?"

"That's just it. Work it easy."

"Why, Alazan wouldn't buck or break in a race if you shot him with rock-salt in the ham! He's steady as an eight-day clock once he wheels and starts for the quarter pole. That gag will work fine. We can get all the respectable citizens, so-called, to gamble on this yet. I was afraid it would be just for the purse."

"So was I. I made it up with Kyack Kearney just now that I was to hide in the bushes and yell for him. To make it sink in, have Alazan out for an exercise spin this afternoon and I'll be in those bushes. As you pass, I'll bob into sight. You manage to spur him a li'le or something, so he'll act wild. That will rile Kyack Kearney all up and get the other suckers that he will spill the beans to betting on that old pack horse."

"Say, Pink, you're fine!" admiringly said Edwards. "I'll put up a hundred for you, if I can get it down."

"Will you, Edwards?" anxiously asked Derby. "I want to get some money to send home to my wife. She's sick——"

"Cut out that weepy stuff, Pink," ordered Edwards roughly; "you do as I say and you'll be all right. Savvy?"

"Yes, I'll do as you say, sir," humbly answered Derby.

"See that you do, then."

Edwards walked out into the street. None but his own cronies were in sight. To them he imparted the plan of Pink Derby, and they indulged in laughter at the expense of Kyack Kearney and any others who might want to bet on the old pack horse.

"We'll make up a big 'cow' on this and all bet with any one that will bet," Edwards told them. "This plan to dump the race will bring all the so-called goody-goody folks into line, with their money in their fists. We'll have to be cautious and toll them on with long odds, though."

"But suppose Alazan drops dead?" Worson asked.

"Well, if old Bossom gets away with that stake money on that spavined old mule, let me know," said Edwards, tapping the butts of his fancy guns. "Let him hold any bets where people ask to have a third man hold the money. He's an old imbecile, anyway, and all puffed up over this stake-money job. He'll be so square he cain't fall over."

"Takes you to think for the gang, Edwards," Worson said.

"Sure does," another echoed this sentiment, so pleasing to the handsome gambler, who smiled at the compliment.

"Who is that coming into town above there?" some one asked.

They all looked. A slender man, who swayed lightly in his saddle, was riding a light-stepping gray into town. He had the blue shirt, the blue-gray hat, the khaki trousers of the Ranger corps

"Singleton, who sometimes rides this district when on patrol in this out of the way corner of the State," Edwards identified the man.

"I wonder if he's heard anything?" Worson began, but Edwards cut him short:

"He might if every one's tongue loosened up at sight of him that a way. Shut up!"

They were silent for a moment. Kyack Kearney, on Goldie, was coming from the other end of town. The ranger and Kyack met in mid-street and were passing without speaking, when Edwards suddenly called:

"Singleton, stop that man!"

"I'll do it myself," said Kyack, swinging around quickly. He faced the officer calmly. Singleton turned to Edwards, who shot out with venom:

"That man packs a concealed weapon."

Singleton looked at Kyack keenly and kneed his horse toward him. Kyack submitted as Singleton leaned over in the saddle and ran his hands over Kyack's clothing dexterously and rapidly. Singleton turned to Edwards:

"I guess you're mistaken, Edwards."

Edwards' face showed disappointment.

"How did you know I had a gun?" Kyack asked.

Edwards did not reply.

"Was it because you tried to get the drop on me on the trail a few days ago, and I fooled you? Tell the folks about it."

Edwards did not speak.

Kyack turned to Singleton, asking: "Is that all, Ranger?"

Singleton nodded shortly. "Yes, and watch what you do around here. I hear some hard things about you and want you to know that we keep an eye on all you horse traders, as often you get hold of 'wet' horses at a big profit."

Kyack rode away humbly enough. Singleton declined an invitation to enter the Golden Bough, pleading haste.

"I've got to ride over to Alamanzo on a hold-up case," he said. "I may not be back this way for a long time, as things seem pretty quiet in this district, men. Well, so long," and he was gone, lightly swaying in the saddle.

"I thought I'd humble Kyack Kearney a bit," Edwards told the gang about him; "and I sure thought he had his buried ace under his armpit, but it seems not, or Singleton would have found it."

"Well, no harm done, rubbing Kyack the wrong way," Worson said. "Let's get the bets made while this story about scaring Alazan with the long yell is good. I thought we'd not get a chance to bet on this race, it looked so one-sided. But this story will perk up the timid souls that want to bet always on a sure thing, and they'll come into the open with their gelt and we'll skin the town again."

They laughed at this pleasing prospect and conferred further as to just which victim each was to pick out in the effort to lure the public's money into the open for the big race.

Meanwhile, Kyack Kearney rode Goldie straight up to his tent close to the corral. He swung down and put the horse into the corral; then he entered the tent and sat down to rest. He loosed his coat and reached inside, shifting the weight of a big gun that rode there under his armpit. He sighed—and smiled.

Cheerful Cullins came in, grinning, as usual.

"Hadn't we ought to take Old Packer out for a trial over that race course, boss?"

"Well, all right, but don't let him run away with you."

"Going?"

"No, I don't want to go to my own funeral in advance, thanks."

Cheerful went away to saddle up Old Packer. As he did so, some one scuttled away from the rear of the tent and vanished behind the corral at a point where some sacking had been spread for shade for the penned horses. Kyack Kearney came out soon and watched Old Packer, under saddle, stiffly carry the young fellow away.

CHAPTER IX.

CHEERFUL TALKS WRONG.

DOWN at the track, Cheerful found the little Mexican lad, Querida, on Alazan, instructed by Edwards, trying out over the short route. A number of loungers watched the work-outs. Edwards called to Cheerful:

"I'll clear the track so you can work that crow-bait out."

"Thanks, we need all the he'p we can get, Mr. Edwards," said Cheerful with every show of respect. He leaned over and asked in a low tone:

"Say, can I get back in with you-all after this race is over? Kyack Kearney is going to be flat broke, and I want to string with winners."

"Why, of course, Cheerful. I'll forget past things and give you another chance."

"Thanks, boss. I'll ride this grulla packer the best I can, which won't be much, Kyack admits. I'll come to you after Kyack Kearney goes out of town broke."

"That's all right with me."

"I've got one hundred dollars to bet for a friend. What odds do I get?"

"Who is the friend? Is it Kyack's money?"

"I'm not saying."

"Here's old Bossom. Let him hold the stakes. I'll give you twenty to one."

"All right. Kyack's a dawg-gone fool, and I don't want to string with one like that."

"Now you're talkin' sense, cowboy. I'll forget the past. Come right to me when it's all over."

Old Bossom took the bet and wrapped up the money and put it in an envelope marked with the names and conditions of the bet. He now had a pocket full of such evidences of bets bulging on one side of him.

Cheerful started Old Packer down the quarter course. He racked along determinedly, like a rocking horse for grace and speed. Yells and laughter greeted this exhibition.

"He's worse than I thought," old Bossom mourned.

"Want to bet on him?" Edwards jeered.

"Who? Me? I should say not, Ged-ap, Blazer," and he started his spavined old mule away at a slow, pitching gait.

"If that old pack hoss was matched against that *mula,* he might have a chance," Edwards jeered at Cheerful.

"I guess that's right, Mr. Edwards, but I'm going to exercise Old Packer a bit, anyway."

"Come back to town, boys," Edwards invited, "and drink with me to the killing we'll make Saturday."

Old Packer was put over the course half a dozen times. Finally, Cheerful rode him slowly away.

As he did so, Pink Derby scuttled out of the bushes and made a short dash for town. He sidled into the Golden Bough and got the ear of Edwards.

"I kept still till that youngster put that crow-bait over that course ten times. He cain't hardly keep out of his own way," he confided.

"Then there's no fake about it. I thought they were saving up something till the last, but if the old horse is no good and if his rider is willing to admit

it and even throw Kyack's own money away, knowing it will be lost, what have we to fear?" Edwards asked. "Kyack is a chump, his hired hand a double crosser, his horse a hat rack. Again I ask, what do we fear?"

"The answer is, 'Nothing.' Give the citizens of this town all the leeway they want. Give them all the odds they want. Bet them all they want. We cain't lose," Worson said joyfully. "The way we played off Alazan as a bucker when Derby yelled from behind that bush fooled some onlookers, too."

"All right; the time's ripe. Beginning to-day we bet all they want, and at any old odds. It's a lead-pipe cinch," Edwards said, and again they all laughed the laugh of victors.

"I saw those fellows that watched Alazan buck when Derby yelled at him from behind that bush," Worson said; "they thought it was because of the yell, when it was because that Mex jockey of yours made him buck by sticking a pin in him as he rode. They swallowed that bait and will tell all the other suckers and sure-thing men in and around town into our net with the story."

And again the crowd of shorthorns laughed heartily.

CHAPTER X.

THEY'RE OFF!

NOON of Saturday found the town filled. Kyack noted the incoming crowd with satisfaction a little before the noon hour came.

"Be a good audience, Cheerful," he said. "The range interests will see fair play, anyway. Some of these town folks will wilt at sight of trouble, but show a range man trouble and he bites it on the neck. Throw that hull onto Old Packer and let's shamble along to the slaughter."

In a few moments Cheerful was ready, with Old Packer under saddle. The veteran pack horse jogged stiff-leggedly along. Kyack was on a gray horse that he had roped out of his few remaining heads of stock. Old Bossom came along just then, his pockets bulging with bet money.

All the people headed toward the beginning of the course.

Old Bossom rode his mule up the course toward the finish. Timers were easily selected from among range men in for the fun. Uncle Billy Berdan was selected finally as starter. The Mexican lad, on Alazan, light as a feather, grinned irritatingly at Cheerful, who sat, glum and sorrowful, on Old Packer. Edwards walked about, glancing benignly on all. Elsa was there to throw a bright smile at Cheerful Cullins. Miss Capen walked over to Cullins and asked:

"Did you do what I asked, young man?"

"Yes'm," Cheerful gulped.

Kyack sat still on his gray, grim and observant. Here and there in the crowd men called to him tauntingly, but Kyack did not answer their jibes.

"He's losing too much to smile at his own funeral," Bill Quillan said, and this joke satisfied the crowd.

"Get those hosses ready," Uncle Billy Berdan warned; "clear a space for them to score down in. Once I get them on a fair startin' line, I'll send them off, no jockeying allowed, either. Take warning."

The horses were sent back a bit and now every one was taut with anxiety. Several men were heard to ask where Pink Derby was, and when it was said he was not to be seen, not a few winked at each other and glanced toward the thick bushes near the finish line, where old Bossom now was waiting to declare the winner.

"You boys ready?" Uncle Billy Berdan yelled.

"Seguro," Querida answered softly.

"Yo tambien!" Cheerful echoed.

"Score down, then; even, now, keep them even—there, that's right, no false starts now!" Uncle Billy warned excitedly, balancing on his toes like a turkey strutting. "There, that's it, gentle, now, easy, easy—— Go!"

Like a flash, Alazan crossed the line of starting. There was a roar from the crowd! Old Packer struck up a stiff-legged gait, at which they roared again.

Alazan was going like a streak of light.

"Nothing to it," Edwards yelled, "except to collect the bets and celebrate."

"Look-it!" Worson shouted. His long arm was pointing and his finger trembling with excitement.

Cheerful Cullins had dropped the reins on Old Packer's neck. Old Packer tucked his tail close to his body and seemed of a sudden to become a living streak of lightning. He passed Alazan like a flash and bolted past the finish line a full three lengths ahead, so far ahead that his victory could be seen even from the starting line. There was no doubt of it, no room for argument.

"My hoss never had a chance," Edwards snarled.

A yell of rage went up from the gamblers and their friends. They bunched and started up the track. The bewildered townsmen and the range men stared, lacking leadership.

"Get old Bossom," Edwards roared; "get him!"

Old Bossom was seen to slide off his mule and dart into the bushes. Cheerful had turned and was racing back on Old Packer. Alazan, not yet turned, was under control, though, and the Mexican turned in his saddle. Suddenly, out of the bushes came Bossom, on Goldie. The old man leaned over in the saddle, Indian-wise, and cut a circle, leaped the golden-hued horse off the low bench and down to the open, rolling range. He circled far out.

"Get him; get to horse and get him," Edwards commanded his adherents. They wheeled, to find Kyack Kearney, on his gray, barring the way back along the track toward the starting line.

"Old Bossom is haided for my tent. Inside, he's got his old eight-square buffalo gun that he can shoot a man's eyelashes off with, at five hundred yards. He'll settle with all winners there. Any one that tries to get him deals with Kyack Kearney first."

Edwards made a move.

Kyack's hand jerked over and his gun spoke once. Edwards clutched at his shoulder and his face was contorted with pain and passion.

"You keep away from me hereafter," Kyack Kearney said steadily; "and pocket your losses with a smile, sir. Hear that! You thought you forced me into a losing race. Well, Old Packer isn't a pack hoss, except when I come into a strange town. He was the champion quarter-hoss of the Jacarilla Apache tribe, and I won him by beating him with my Goldie as I passed through their reservation not long ago. He'll carry either a saddle or a pack, and any man that savvies will tell you that a pack hoss is pretty apt to walk stiff-laigged when he's got a pack on, because it makes him heavy in front, out of balance, like. Put Old Packer under a kyack and he sure looks like a plug; but once he starts under saddle, he's like the desert wind. Good day, Edwards & Co. Winners, all over to my tent and old man Bossom will pay. Oh, yes, we exercised Old Packer on Bossom's flat, nights, when you-all were playing skin-tight faro and poker at the Golden Bough. Edwards, when you grow some eye teeth, come see me *sir*."

Edwards and his crowd, seeing that the honest rangemen were with Kyack Kearney, and all the more so as they were on the winning side, subsided. Miss Capen came to where Cheerful Cullins was astride Old Packer:

"Cheerful, did you bet it for me?" she asked.

"Sure, at twenty to one."

Turning to Kyack Kearney, Miss Capen exclaimed:

"Two thousand dollars! I knew you were a man of sense."

"I'll be down to-night and get a plate of ham-and and French fried and cup of that nectar you call coffee," Kyack said

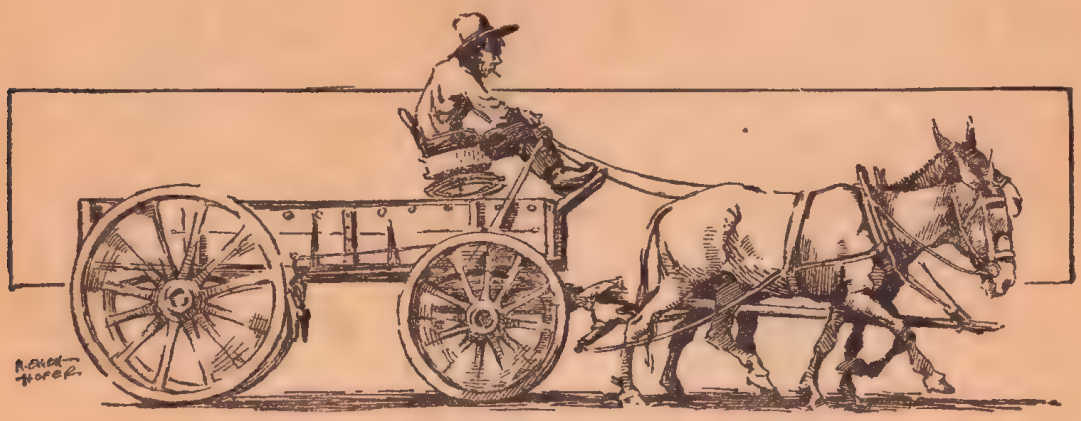
'And it won't cost you a cent," she replied, with a look of beaming satisfaction.

"Come on, folks, and collect," Kyack invited.

"Let's make her unanimous," Uncle Billy Berdan chimed in.

"Hurrah for Kyack Kearney!" some one proposed.

And as they marched back toward town, the cheers were given with a will. At the procession's tail woefully tramped the trimmed gamblers, with Edwards, nursing his bullet-nicked shoulder, in the very rear. But as he tramped so, he scowled, raising his clenched left hand on high, and solemnly swore to even the score on Kyack Kearney.



WHERE THE VEGETABLES COME FROM

VEGETARIANISM, which at first was looked upon as a fad, has succeeded in firmly establishing itself in popular favor, and it has the support of the physician and the fashionable. That means that vegetarianism is here to stay.

In the production of vegetables California goes to the head of the class and leads every other State in the Union as a source of vegetable and fruit supplies. New York and Florida vie for second place, but during the year 1928 twenty-four per cent of all the fruits and vegetables produced in this country had their origin in California. All the better-known vegetables—carrots and peas, and lettuce and celery and broccoli, are forthcoming the year around from this sunny State of California.

Then there are some little peculiarities which render the story of the vegetables interesting and show that they have "temperament," too, just like the persons who thrive on them. For instance, artichokes will grow only in the comparatively small region known as the San Francisco Basin, and iceberg lettuce will go no farther east than the State of Colorado. The Bermuda onion obligingly flourishes in southern Texas and in the Coachella Valley of southern California. Missouri ousted Illinois as the leader of the horseradish market. There is an increasing rivalry for popularity between the potato and the onion, with the former still well in the lead, and having the additional advantage of growing almost anywhere. Rutabaga turnips come from Canada. For some strange reason, New York both produces and consumes more cabbage than any other State.

Pioneer Towns of the West

(Palestine, Texas)

By Duane Clark

SITUATED upon an elevation of ground twenty-four miles wide which is bounded by two rivers, the Neches and the Trinity, lies Palestine, the county seat of Anderson County. The view from this point is one of hills and valleys, tall pines, giant oaks, and sweet gum. Here, the beauty of the winding red roads has been left untouched by human ministrations.

Long ago, this country was inhabitated by highly civilized Indian tribes, known as Tejas, from which the name Texas is derived. As early as 1690, Spaniards established their first mission to teach Christianity to the Indians. Below the southern boundary of Anderson County, within a few miles of each other, eleven Indian villages formed a center known as the Nacogdoches municipality.

At this time, Fort Houston, a log fort stockade, two miles west of Palestine, was the outpost of civilization in east Texas and refuge from the Indians.

In 1836, Sam Houston and his army gained independence for Texas at the battle of San Jacinto. Ten years later the Republic of Texas was admitted into the Union as a State. As soon as this happened a stream of immigration poured into east Texas. The people who came did not belong to the type one associates with pioneers and frontier settlements. Rather, they were of a finer quality—descendants of some of the proudest families in America.

These wanderers, seeking new homes, brought with them their silver and fine linen. It is said that a few rode through the wilderness in silver-mounted carriages, while others came in covered wagons. One family, descendants of French nobility, brought a trunkful of real lace; another, making the long and tedious journey of three months,

brought no furniture, but instead, a large library. These volumes, through the generosity of the owner, formed a free circulating library in 1853, probably one of the first in the Southwest.

Other arrivals brought with them the traditions and ideals of a cultivated society, and established a high degree of civilization in that wild and heretofore untrodden country. Thus the very foundation of Palestine was one of culture and education, its residents numbering about two hundred inhabitants. To-day it still maintains this position, never forgetting that the proud blood of those courageous and cultured forebears flows in the veins of its citizens.

Palestine is now a city of more than twelve thousand inhabitants, and has grown along the lines prescribed by its pioneers. It has a splendid system of public schools, fine buildings and equipment for both white and negro schools, handsome churches, a Carnegie Public Library and museum attached.

Of women's organizations there are: Daughters of the Republic of Texas; Daughters of the Confederacy, and Daughters of the American Revolution. There are a number of study clubs, a Chamber of Commerce, Rotary and Lions clubs, and three country clubs.

Palestine is on the main line of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Two important highways pass through the county, east and west, and north and south, three fourths of which are hard surfaced, the rest being under construction. A three or four hour ride through interesting country brings one to Dallas. Houston is six hours away. Palestine is often referred to as the "hub" of East Texas, because it is the largest city between Dallas and Houston.

Many kinds of flowers grow in this part of Texas and the homes and lawns of Palestine are real beauty spots, with their roses and crape myrtle trees and various flowering plants. Particularly in spring and autumn is Palestine at its best. Nature-loving tourists will find here all that their fondest fancies dream of. Palestine makes a splendid winter resort. Golf is played all the year.

It is said that the soil will produce almost any crop known. It is perfectly adapted to stock and poultry raising and dairying. Besides these occupations there are wholesale and manufacturing interests. There is an industrial pay roll of three million dollars. The general offices and shops of the I. G. N. Railroad are located here.

The winters at Palestine are mild. At an altitude of four hundred and nine feet, the atmosphere is considered particularly pure and beneficial.

Many distinguished people have at various times made Palestine their home. Among them are B. F. Yoakum, railroad magnate; J. Marcus Davis, president of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad Co.; Columbus Haile, president of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas Railroad; Warner E. Williams, high official of the M. K. & T.

Judge Ben Greenwood, of Austin, Texas, once made Palestine his home. Others worthy of mention are: John H. Reagan, United States Senator and Postmaster General of the Confederate Cabinet, who is called the "Grand Old Man of Texas"; Thomas Mitchell Campbell, governor of Texas; Roger Q. Mills, United States senator, spent his early days in Palestine; Reuben A. Reeves was a distinguished jurist of two generations ago; Mrs. Percy V. Pennypacker, once president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs; Doctor Eugene Barker, of the University of Texas, ranking historian of the Southwest; A. W. Gregg, member of Congress, and his son, Alexander Gregg, the latter considered a financial wizard.

One of the most prominent women in Palestine is Miss Mary K. Hunter. It was through Miss Hunter's efforts that the writer was able to procure the material here presented.

Hold Your Horses

By George Cory Franklin

Author of "Fair for Forty," etc.

"YOU'D better kill him, Clayt, before he does any more harm." Jim Wing's iron-gray brows knitted over cold, blue eyes. "He's killed one man and knocked out another. When a half-thoroughbred horse gets that sort of a start he's worse than any ordinary outlaw."

Clayt Matthews, foreman for Wing, owner of the Lazy W, blew a cloud of smoke into the sun-drenched air and looked out toward the foothills over which a big, rangy bay was trotting with head held high as if he exulted in his victory over the dark-faced man who was being carried on an improvised stretcher toward the bunk house.

"The horse wasn't wholly to blame, boss, neither time," said Clayt.

"There you go," broke in Wing testily. "You can always find some excuse for that horse. I tell you he'd bad, and the sooner he's made into coyote meat, the better it'll be for the Lazy W riders."

"You didn't see all that play this morning," Clayt went on quietly. "Bandy made him mad by wrappin' his rope around him when he was crossin' the creek. I saw him hit Geronimo twice with his rawhide reata. Bandy is mean to the stock—cruel, unreasonable. That horse has got more brains than that bronc peeler ever had."

"Why don't you fire Bandy then?"

Clayt's eyes became as expressionless as pools of blue steel, and as coldly hard. "I'd rather have Bandy where I can watch him than workin' for somebody else on this range."

"There you are again, suspicious of men, and always makin' excuses for horses! You sure don't use the same judgment, Clayt, about this thing that you do about other matters. Usually, I don't put my foot down with you, but this time I'm goin' to. If you don't kill Geronimo, I will."

"What you say, boss, goes with me. Geronimo dies, but I want to tell you right now that you're orderin' me to kill a noble animal, and you're lettin' a snake live that's ornery as any Apache that ever crossed the Mogollons." Clayt went into the bunk house, took a .30-30 rifle from a rack and came out, slipping it into the saddle scabbard which hung under his left stirrup leather.

Wing walked stubbornly into the house. A sense of regret bothered him as he thought of the beautiful creature whose death he had just decreed, but he was sure that Clayt was allowing his dislike for Bandy to influence his usually splendid judgment, and he had dogmatically ordered the horse killed on that account.

Clayt swung up on his horse and jogged away toward the K T range, in which direction Geronimo had trotted. He wanted to get the distasteful affair over as quickly as possible. He had been told to do the thing that of all things a cowboy hates to do, and Clayt would not ask one of the other riders to do what he would have given a month's wages to have avoided. Wing had said "kill Geronimo," and Clayt would do it; but some day when Bandy, who was not badly injured, got around again, Clayt would verify the thing which he suspected now, and when he did—well, it would not be half as hard for Clayt to draw against a man who could draw against him and shoot back as it was to sneak up and murder a horse just because he had defended himself against cruelty.

Clayt swore softly at his luck and rode cautiously up the slope, expecting to see his unconscious victim grazing in the next gulch. For some reason, Geronimo had not stopped to feed. He had been terribly enraged that morning, and his anger had been only half appeased when he had reared and struck at Bandy, and now he wanted to put as much distance as possible between himself and the Lazy W Ranch. His tracks showed that he was going straight for the high range back of the K T Ranch, a route that a year before Clayt would have been tickled to death to have an excuse to follow, but Kitty Turner had been strangely cold toward him lately, and Clayt was far too independent to go where he was not wanted.

He had loved Kitty since she was a little girl, when he had held his first job as a nighthawk for the Lazy W ten years before. He had never injured her, even in thought, and he had no idea why she should be angry with him. But angry she undoubtedly was, and Clayt hoped that Geronimo would not go to the K T Ranch, where he would have to follow him. His blood chilled at the mere thought of having Kitty see him kill Geronimo. He well knew how her pretty lips would curl with disdain for any man who on any pretext would do so cowardly a thing as to murder a defenseless horse, and especially one like Geronimo.

The K T Ranch, owned by Knight Turner, was even a larger ranch than Wing's, and Kitty would some day own all these broad meadows, but Clayt had never thought of that, except to wish that Kitty was not so rich. It was hard for a cow-ranch foreman at a hundred a month to expect to win the daughter of the man who owned the K T. Turner himself, however, had always been more than cordial to Clayt, and rumor had it that the old man would gladly have the affairs of the big ranch in Clayt's competent hands; but Clayt was as independent as either Kitty or her father, and when he asked Kitty to marry him, if ever, he intended to be able to support her without assistance.

Thoughts like this were not in the cowboy's mind, however, as he trailed the big bay gelding across the next draw and spurred his horse into a lope up the slope beyond.

There was no mistaking the tracks

made by the small, shapely feet of Geronimo, and Clayt rode on across the heads of the draws above the K T Ranch without looking once toward the buildings less than a quarter of a mile away. In the next strip of timber he saw where Geronimo had stopped and stood for some minutes watching his back trail as elk or deer would have done.

"Foxy!" muttered the cowboy. "That horse has got brains. He knows which way to watch for danger."

More than ever was his task distasteful to Clayt. He got off his saddle horse near the edge of the piñons and took the rifle from its scabbard, pumped the lever to throw a shell from the magazine into the chamber, and walked slowly forward, watching to see the black tips of Geronimo's silken ears.

The little park Clayt was stealing upon was one of those rare range beauty spots where a cold spring bubbles from under a rocky channel and waters a tiny meadow of wire grass, red top and pink clover. Around an almost level park aspens threw a circle of green. Scattered over the meadow was the blue of iris and the lavender of columbines. Here and there splotches of the pink blossoms of deer grass showed, and in the very center of this glorious setting stood Geronimo, a picture of wild, colorful beauty, his head high, his glorious eyes flashing with the fire of untamed spirit.

Clayt leaned against a tree, faint with the struggle he was undergoing. His face was white. He bit his under lip until it bled, and began slowly raising the rifle to his cheek. The faint breeze was blowing from the horse toward Clayt, and Geronimo was unconscious of what was about to happen. Slowly, in hands that, despite long training, trembled, Clayt raised the rifle until the white bead rested just back of Geronimo's left ear; nestled the butt lightly against his shoulder as the front sight showed in the rear clover leaf sight, and squeezed his hand. The little weapon barked spitefully and Geronimo fell limply to the ground. Tears stood in Clayt's eyes as he stuck the rifle back in its scabbard and rode over to be sure that the horse was quite dead. That was the way with Clayt. He was always thorough in all that he did. He never had to worry about having to go back and do anything over. He rode now to look at the victim of his own sense of duty, spurring his snorting horse closer in order to see that the work was well done.

Through misty eyes he saw the small round hole just back of the spinal cord, from which a small stream of red trickled down over the neck of the horse, and as he looked he saw that Geronimo's big brown eyes were not glazed nor filmy, but there seemed to be surprise, wonder, questioning in them—certainly the horse was not dead. For a moment Clayt stared, then with the celerity of skillful practice his right hand passed down over the buckle on his 45-foot yacht line reata and came up holding the coil. A loop seemed to run out through the honda of its own volition, and with an expert twist it dropped over the front feet of the fallen horse and was jerked tight. Setting his saddle horse back against the rope Clayt sprang down and looping his light riding rope about the hind feet of the horse, he drew them up and half-hitched all four feet together. This gave him the use of his reata, which he quickly looped about Geronimo's neck and fashioned a hackamore.

Geronimo was conscious now, slowly regaining a hold on the world he had come within half an inch of leaving forever. Clayt had brought his big hat full of cold water from the spring. He sat down with Geronimo's head in his lap while he bathed the nerves about the head of the horse, talking to him all the time. He was seated thus when Knight Turner and an immaculately dressed tourist rode into the park. Knight at

once recognized the cowboy and rode in his direction.

"Been range ropin' one have you, son?" asked the old cattleman cordially.

"No, Mister Turner," Clayt answered. "I've done a trick I've often heard of, but never saw done before. I creased him."

"Waal, I swan!" said the old cattleman, getting down and examining the hole made by the rifle bullet. "If you didn't, I'm a sheep-herder! Just back of the spinal cord. Never hurt him a mite. Look a' here, Catherton!" The dude tourist's face was flushed. "I do not care to come any closer to such brutality," he said. "This young ruffian should be horsewhipped."

Clayt and Turner looked at each other in amazement. That any one should put this construction on the affair had never occurred to either of them. Turner scratched his head, puzzled how to explain that this was wholly an accident, and yet that Clayt had thereby captured the horse.

"You see, Catherton," Turner went on, "horses on the range that can't be caught any other way are sometimes creased like this horse is with a rifle bullet, and while they're sort o' stunned like, a man ties 'em up. They ain't hurt at all. By to-morrow morning this horse won't even know he was shot."

"Such explanations are useless to me, Mr. Turner. I only see a case of extreme cruelty which I shall report to the nearest humane officer. It is wholly in keeping with other atrocities I have heard of this man committing."

From this remark Clayt reasoned that the man knew him, or at least thought he did. He wondered what he meant, but he was so wholly disgusted with the bigotry and intolerance of the stranger that he did not give the matter much thought till later. Catherton rode away toward the K T, and Clayt went on with his explanations to Turner.

"You see, this horse is half thoroughbred and he's got as much temper as any human. Bandy, our bronc peeler, is a ornery cuss, and he stings Geronimo with a rope. The horse had knocked a man off once before for doin' the same thing, and tromped him to death. He reared and struck Bandy. Luckily for the man, there were several riders saw the fracas, and they fought the horse off. Bandy was knocked out, that was all, but if the boys hadn't drove Geronimo off he'd 'a' sure killed him. Wing can't see but one side of it, and that is that Geronimo is a killer, which I'm willin' to admit he's goin' to be pretty soon unless it's worked out of him, and Jim ordered me to go kill him. When I shot the horse, I was intendin' to put his light out, but when I saw I had creased him I just tied him up without thinkin' as to what I'll do next. I sure do hate to kill a horse."

Turner moved his head affirmatively. "I know how you feel. I've got a high, round corral that ain't in use. Suppose we put him in there and you go tell Wing that I'll be responsible for him. He's still sort o' dazed like from the shock of that bullet. We can handle him easily, the two of us."

Clayt was happy to accept such a solution and, held firmly between two cow horses, Geronimo was safely escorted to the K T Ranch and put in the round corral. A log chain was passed around the gate and post and locked with a heavy padlock.

As Clayt rode away toward the Lazy W Ranch, he saw Catherton seated on the porch of the Turner home talking with Kitty. For an easily understood reason the cowboy resented the manner of the "dude" as he leaned over the girl. The newcomer was wholly foreign to the wild, free life of the range, and the type of men Kitty had always known. The cowboy knew that the girl was unchaperoned except for Jim Toy, the Chinese cook.

Clayt spurred his horse unnecessarily

hard and his lips clamped shut in a straight line. "Little goose!" he muttered. "She never saw that sort of a reptile before, and she don't even know what he's like. It's a wonder Knight don't kick him off the place!"

Deceit or concealment were no part of Clayt's nature. He went straight to Wing and told him what had occurred, and that Geronimo was now safely in a corral from which there was no possibility of his escaping. Wing felt better satisfied with this outcome of the affair than he thought best to let Clayt know. He had been in the dumps all day at having arbitrarily decreed the death of the horse. Perhaps Clayt might have been right, after all, and the horse not entirely to blame for either of the accidents that had given him the reputation of being a man-killer.

"Now you've got him, what are you goin' to do with him?" Wing asked.

"I'm goin' to break him in my own way, and when he's broke you're goin' to sell him to me for a hundred dollars."

"He's your pony," Wing replied. "I guess I owe you that much for doin' that. You'd do your duty no matter how tough it seemed. A lot of men would have quit rather than kill a horse."

The next morning Clayt sat on top of the corral at the K T and admired the smooth, round body and slender, well-muscled legs of his prize. Geronimo was no longer dazed. He walked proudly about the corral, his eyes flashing with hatred and the desire for revenge. Clayt watched his chance and dropped a loop around the long, slender neck of the horse. The instant Geronimo felt the hated rope tighten he charged and, standing on his hind legs, struck with the speed of an angry buck at the cowboy.

"Well meant, pardner," said Clayt, "and if I'd been fool enough to have rode a rope horse in there with you like these bronc peelers have been doin', you'd 'a' trimmed my ears for me."

Clayt sat on the fence and smoked while the furious horse fought the rope. Geronimo struck, bit, kicked, and otherwise worked himself into a lather. Finally he stopped and stood trembling, flinching whenever the slender yacht-line reata touched him. Now for the first time the wild horse became conscious of a pleasant crooning which seemed to soothe his taut nerves and quiet his fear. He turned toward the sound and saw Clayt sitting on the fence. He took a step or two toward the cowboy as if he would charge again, but instead he stood raising and lowering his head, at times shaking it threateningly, and again standing quietly, one ear forward, the other back, while he listened to that crooning voice.

Catherton rode up on one of the horses from the dude ranch where he was staying. Evidently, he hoped to make an impression by his dress, for he was got up as elaborately as a showman at a rodeo—ridiculously large hat, a flaming red shirt, angora-faced chaps, and a nickle-plated gun strapped about his waist in such a position as to make it impossible for him to get it out of its holster, except with an awkward movement of both hands. Curiosity and a naturally meddlesome disposition caused Catherton to ride close to the round corral and peer through a crack between two poles.

"What are you doing now to torture that poor wounded beast?" he demanded.

"Why, just now I'm quietin' him down cause he gets mad when he smells a strange human," replied Clayt.

Catherton was furious. He had nothing but contempt for these uncouth Westerners, anyway, and for Clayt to presume to speak to him in such a manner was simply infuriating to Catherton. There was no mistaking Clayt's meaning. A man would have had to be far less subtle than was Harold Catherton not to have understood.

"You insolent young pup!" he raged.

"Do you know to whom you are talking?"

"From the noise you make brayin' around I should judge I'd been wastin' my remarks on a burro," said the cowboy quietly. "Still, I ain't got nuthin' agin' a burro, either; maybe I'd better take that back."

"Why! why!" Catherton sputtered.

He was too outraged for speech. Boiling with anger, he bethought himself of the revolver strapped about his waist and began jerking at it. For the first time Clayt turned to face the man. Sitting on his left thigh, his right leg hanging free beside the corral fence, he changed his position. He noticed that Kitty Turner was walking rapidly toward the corral. Evidently she had heard Catherton's shrill voice and was coming to warn him of the danger he was courting.

The sight of the girl steadied Clayt as nothing else could have done. "We'd better not quarrel here, stranger," he said in a voice so low as to be almost friendly, "there's a lady present."

If Catherton had known the breed with which he was dealing he would have known that Clayt was ten times more dangerous when he talked in this quiet manner than he had been a few minutes before when he was openly insulting. But the tenderfoot misunderstood. He believed he saw in the quiet, conciliatory tones only that he was bluffing this cowboy, and his face flushed at the thought of the exhibition he would give to Kitty. He would show this Western girl how much she overestimated the bravery and skill of these range men!

Kitty was perhaps twenty yards from the pair at the corral when Catherton managed to get the gun from its holster and, brandishing it in what he thought to be a threatening manner, he leveled it from his shoulder in true shooting-gallery style, the barrel pointing at Clayt's body. The girl saw much more than Catherton did. Clayt's left hand had dropped so that it hung just over a gun in an open holster. His fingers twitched nervously and his eyes were narrowing.

"Stop!" shrieked the girl. "Clayt Matthews, don't you dare to kill that man!"

Such an absurd view of the situation which he supposed he dominated caused Catherton to turn his head in surprise that Kitty should not have seen that it was the cowboy, and not himself, who was in danger.

"Don't worry about me, my dear," Catherton swaggered. "Can't you see that I've——"

Swish! Clayt's right boot came up with a kick that sent the nickle-plated gun out of Catherton's hand and spinning through the air, to land with a splash in an irrigation ditch.

"I'm sorry I had to tame your amusin' poodle, Kit," the cowboy drawled. "I didn't intend to kill him, that is—not yet."

Kitty stamped her foot. "How dare you refer to my friend in such language?" she stormed.

"I sure beg your pardon, Kit. I never knew you had a poodle. I'll apologize to the little dog for connectin' his name with this here swelled-up toad."

"Oh, you——" Kitty was on the verge of tears. "I think you're the most hateful man in the country!"

"Now, ain't that funny? It ain't so very long ago I heard you talk different from that," said Clayt easily, "but I know now what's made the change, and I'm tellin' you Kitty, that it ain't your fault. You couldn't know, not havin' had a mother since you was six to explain to you that you can't trust everybody same as you can these boys you've been raised with."

Catherton had recovered from his surprise at the ease with which he had been disarmed.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I would harm Miss Kitty?" he demanded.

Clayt crossed his legs and balanced himself on the top of the fence while he rolled a smoke. "Not for a minute am I makin' any such statement," he said. "I wouldn't belittle any well-raised Western girl by thinkin' that a fuzzy worm could injure her. As to your intentions, that's an entirely different matter."

"Come on, Harold, don't stay here any longer," coaxed Kitty. "Your hand is bruised. Come up to the house and let me dress it."

There was deep sorrow in Clayt's heart as he saw the two walk away toward the house, Catherton still expostulating that he had not been in danger.

"Don't be stupid," snapped Kitty. "He could have shot your gun out of your hand!"

"Hardly that," said Catherton. "His gun was not even drawn from its holster."

Kitty stopped and faced him. "Whatever else you may think or say about these cowboys, don't deceive yourself about their ability, speed, or accuracy. He didn't need to draw his gun. All he would have done would have been to push the holster down and shoot through the open end of it. For some reason he did not want to kill you. Otherwise, nothing could have saved you."

Clayt turned back to his work of gentling Geronimo, but to one who knew the cowboy the stern expression of his face told of a suffering too deep for words. The quieting of Geronimo's fears gave a splendid and almost providential outlet for the murder that was growing in his heart. Clayt flipped the reata around the snubbing post before he climbed down into the corral, and when he finally stood on the ground Geronimo was almost wholly occupied with straining his ears to hear that sound which seemed strangely familiar. It was a quaint old negro melody such as horse handlers hum as they work among the colts, and the thoroughbred strain in the horse responded to latent memories of which he was not conscious.

Clayt moved cautiously to the snubbing post and quickly took another turn around it. Geronimo stepped forward, and the cowboy pulled up the slack. The horse felt the rope tighten and, with a scream of terror and rage combined, he reared, striking with both front feet. Clayt was out of danger, and with each plunge of the horse the taut rope shortened until, still fighting, Geronimo's head was pulled close to the snubbing post.

"Run and tell Lige,
Hurry up, Pomp!
Meet me by the gum tree
Down in the swamp,
We'll meet Nicodemus to-day."

sang the cowboy. For the first time in his five years of wild life the outlaw felt the gentle touch of human hands upon his head. He had been too stunned the day before to sense the petting and rubbing Clayt had given him, and now the caressing of his ears and the gentle scratching of his neck under his heavy mane gave the horse the greatest satisfaction he had ever experienced.

Slowly the taut rope loosened ever so slightly and as Clayt stopped rubbing, Geronimo leaned forward, following his hand, asking as plainly as words could have asked for more.

"Sort o' gettin' under your hide, ain't it, pony?" crooned Clayt. "Well, you just control that quick temper of yours and in a month you and me will be havin' some good times together."

For a week Clayt worked cautiously with the horse whenever his other duties would permit. Gradually it was born in upon Geronimo that every comfort that came to him—food, cold, clear water, the gentle rubbing of his head, the brushing of his silken mane—all were given him by this tall, bronzed-faced cowboy. The murderous rage to fight that had been aroused in Geronimo whenever he

saw a human being was being supplanted by an emotion he had never experienced before.

One morning as Clayt rode to the corral he saw Geronimo's head close to the ground in a ludicrously awkward position as the big horse peeked through the largest crack he could find, watching for the coming of the man whom a week before he would have gladly killed. Clayt grinned and whistled. Lately he had whistled part of the time as he worked with the horse. For the first time there came a low nicker of welcome from Geronimo.

Turner came along the path from the house. "You're gettin' him, boy," he said, "and sure he'll be a one-man horse, if ever there was one. He'll barely tolerate me, and last evening Catherton walked by here and Geronimo charged the fence. If he could have got to the man he'd have killed him in a minute."

Clayt rested lazily in his saddle, twisted on one leg. "Where'd Kitty pick up that dude?" he asked.

"She met him last winter when he was in Denver at the Stock Show. He's a friend of some school friends of hers, and they made it up for him to spend a month here at the ranch. You don't like him, do you?"

Clayt parried the question. "Seems sort o' like he admires himself enough to do for everybody, don't he?"

Turner scratched his head. "Uh-huh, I feel that way, too. I had my banker look him up when I see him and Kitty gettin' so thick. I wanted to know whether he was really after my girl, or whether he wanted this place that'll be hers some time. He's got a lot o' money. His father was in on that big oil strike at Mexia a few years ago. It can't be money he's after."

Clayt's eyes widened with wonder. Turner, who was unusually keen about most things, was evidently blind as to the character of the man, although the cowboy had placed a correct valuation on him almost instantly. A dark red overspread Clayt's face. He was far too much of a man to sow any seeds of suspicion against a rival. If Kitty preferred a fellow who was so unquestionably a four-flusher, not by so much as a look would Clayt interfere, but, if his suspicions were correct, even though it were all over between him and Kitty, Clayt would be like a hound on Catherton's trail.

"There's somethin' else I can't quite sabe," Turner went on, "and that is why Catherton should be so thick with that bronc peeler of yours?"

Clayt's face showed his surprise. "What, Bandy?"

"Uh-huh! They're together a heap. Whenever Catherton ain't here at the K T, him and Bandy are off on some private business of their own."

The Lazy W foreman thought rapidly. He had not asked Bandy to go on with his work of roughing out a bunch of saddle stock, on account of the bruises that had been given him by Geronimo, but he remembered now that on one pretext or another Bandy had ridden away from the Lazy W every day.

That day Clayt rode Geronimo for the first time. After a few seconds of furious bucking the big bay quieted down and stood still listening to the crooning melody which he had come to associate with the man who was slowly winning his love.

Clayt rattled his right foot in the stirrup. Geronimo cocked one ear down and cringed, but as the crooning continued, he concluded that he could stand the rattling, and did not jump. Watching the ears of the horse closely, Clayt eased himself out of the saddle without pushing down the blind, and stood beside Geronimo rubbing him under the mane, and praising him for his good sense.

The next day Geronimo had his first lesson outside of the corral and after a little time he trotted away over the foot-

hills, yielding willingly to the guiding of Clayt's gentle pull on the hackamore ropes.

Clayt had not seen Catherton since the day of the encounter by the corral, and he knew that Kitty had arranged for her friend to come to see her at a time when he would be least likely to meet the cowboy. Turner himself rode with Clayt on this first trip to render aid, in case the big bay should revert to his old disposition and forget the lessons he had learned.

Kitty had not been quite contented since the day she had seen Catherton measured up beside Clayt. In spite of her stubbornly telling herself that Clayt had insulted Catherton without any provocation, there had been a sturdy, honest look in Clayt's eyes that had thrilled the girl, and though she would not admit it to herself, her new admirer had not shown up to advantage beside her childhood playmate.

She saw her father and Clayt ride away, saw the beautiful animal stepping daintily under the graceful form of as good a rider as Kitty had ever seen. Her heart turned a somersault when she saw Geronimo spring lightly over the same ditch into which Clayt had kicked Catherton's gun. She knew that but for this estrangement she would be one of that party trotting away toward the foothills she loved so well.

Hardly had the two horsemen disappeared in the first piñons when Kitty saw another rider coming toward the ranch. She was a little surprised when she recognized Bandy, and supposed something had happened to delay Catherton and that he had thoughtfully sent Bandy with a message. Her cheeks colored proudly as she thought how careful men like Catherton were in the small trifles which women love. No range man would have gone to this much trouble just to prevent her being worried or disappointed.

Bandy trailed his reins in front of the house and walked boldly toward where Kitty stood in the doorway. Kitty recoiled at his expression and repulsive face. Bandy laughed unpleasantly.

"You wasn't expectin' me this mornin', was you? Gosh, but you're a swell looker when your face is red like that! No wonder my boss is crazy about you."

"What do you want here?" Kitty demanded. "My father has just left."

"Yeah, I saw him and that meddlesome Lazy W foreman ridin' off. That's why I come. Don't you appreciate my comin' when you're all alone?"

Before Kitty could recover from her surprise Bandy grabbed her about the waist, though she fought and struggled to prevent it. No girl could mistake such brutality as this, and Kitty's shrieks brought Jim Toy, the Chinese cook, rushing from the kitchen, a heavy cleaver in his hand. Bandy saw him and released the girl, his hand flashing back to a low-hung gun.

"Git back to your pots and kettles, you slant-eyed interferer!" he snarled.

But Jim Toy was an old and faithful servant. He had taken care of Kitty since her mother died, and he would give every drop of blood in his devoted old body to save her now. He did not retreat but stepped closer.

The years Kitty had lived amid such scenes as this had prepared her to act quickly. Before Bandy's slow brain could adjust itself to the changed situation, she had grabbed her father's saddle carbine from the rack and sprung to Jim Toy's side.

Bandy heard her jerk the lever down to throw a cartridge from the magazine into the chamber of the little rifle, and before he could decide whether or not to kill Jim Toy, he was covered by a cocked gun in the hands of the outraged girl.

"Go!" she ordered.

"Yeah," echoed Jim Toy, "bettle you go quick else little missie she sloot you head off."

Slowly, Bandy's muscles relaxed. He caught the sound made by a horse trotting across the dooryard and glanced toward the door. Some one was coming, and no matter who it was, Bandy knew the game was up so far as he was concerned. His face showed relief when he saw Catherton standing in the doorway. The dude took in the scene at a glance.

"What's the matter, Bandy?" he asked.

"Oh, nuthin'. I was just jokin' with Kitty, and this chink got proddy."

"He lies, Harold," said the girl through lips that were white and stiff. "He grabbed me, and, and——"

"There, there, my dear," said Catherton, "don't be unreasonable. Bandy didn't mean any harm, I am sure. Did you, Bandy?"

"Course not, boss."

Kitty could scarcely believe her senses. That Catherton, who had professed to love her, and had asked her to marry him, should pass lightly over such an attempt as this was unbelievable.

Jim Toy stood his ground, still belligerent. "Bettle not let my boss see any such thlicks as that, or he sloot the daylights out of both of you."

"Go on back to your work, Jim," ordered Catherton. "It is not your place to defend Miss Kitty."

"Stay right where you are, Jim Toy," said Kitty. "Let me understand you clearly, Harold." She pointed at the grinning Bandy. "Do you mean to let that brute go unpunished? And what does he mean by referring to you as his boss?"

Catherton began trying to soothe Kitty. "You'd better go, Bandy," he said. "Now, my dear, don't be foolish." He stepped nearer, only to find the rifle turned in his direction. He sprang back behind a heavy table. The look in Kitty's blue eyes was not friendly. "Why, Kitty, you can't be conscious of what you are doing. That gun might go off."

"I'll say it might," snapped the girl. "In fact, it's going to, unless you follow Bandy in a fraction of a split second. I know now what Clayt meant when he called you the other day. Go, before I kill you!"

"Yeah, go befole I kill you, too." Jim Toy backed Kitty up.

Catherton walked to the door. He turned for a minute and looked back at the angry girl and the belligerent Chinaman. "You will feel differently about this when you have time to think it over," he said. "I am not going to let this make any difference in our plans. When you want to see me I'll be down at the hotel."

Kitty ran to her room and threw herself on the bed, sobbing hysterically. Jim Toy saw Bandy and Catherton ride away together, then with true Mongolian faith in the efficacy of his cure he brewed a cup of tea and placed it beside her bed. He had started out of the room when a smothered voice called to him out of the depths of a pillow.

"Jim Toy!"

"Yes, missie."

"Thank you, Jim Toy."

"Yes, missie, allee light."

"Jim Toy, let's not tell my father about what happened to-day."

The Chinaman stood wondering at the audacity of this suggestion. Jim Toy had been looking forward to what would done to Bandy and the overbearing Catherton, whom he hated cordially, when Knight Turner was told of the attack upon Kitty. He did not know the subtle depths of an American girl's mind, and he thought she was doing this to shield Catherton.

"Suppose me no tell him? Suppose Catherton come again? Jim Toy split his head open with cleavel."

"Catherton will not come back, Jim Toy." Kitty was sitting up now, sipping the tea. "I don't want dad to mix up with this. If anybody is to know, I'd rather it would be Clayt Matthews."

Jim Toy's eyes snapped with approval of this plan. Either Bandy or Catherton might kill Knight Turner, but Clayt Matthews— Jim Toy's face was as expressionless as a clay mask. "Mebbeso you tell Clayt?" he asked.

"Uh-huh, I'll tell him the very first chance I get."

"Allee light. Cathelton allee same dead man." Jim Toy clattered away to the kitchen.

To Turner, Kitty seemed happier that night than she had been since the visit to the Stock Show. She asked many questions about the outlaw horse that Clayt was breaking—was he really a killer, had Clayt got him so that he was safe to ride, did her father think the horse would kill a man if Clayt were not around?

"He's sure a one-man horse, all right," said Turner. "He'll let Clayt get on and off without a blind, but once when I started to walk toward him he snorted and his eyes began to flash like a mad steer. Clayt will be workin' cows off that horse before fall, but Geronimo will never forget an injury, and any man he hates will be in danger if he goes near him."

Kitty, from the shelter of her own curtained window, had seen Clayt and her father come into the ranch. She had watched Clayt swing up gracefully to the saddle on his other horse and canter away toward the Lazy W. There was no doubt in her mind now as to the real worth of this man. Very well she knew that, had any man on earth shown her the slightest discourtesy in the presence of Clayt Matthews, he would have paid for it with his life. There was enough of the tiger in her to make her wish that she might be present when the two ruffians were called by Clayt. So perfect was her confidence in the skill of the cowboy that she had no fear for him at all, even though Bandy was known to be fast and tricky.

Catherton called up over the telephone that evening. Turner answered. "Wait a minute," he said, "she was here just a second ago." He went through the house calling loudly for Kitty. No Kitty was to be found. "Jim Toy," said the rancher sticking his head into the kitchen, "where's Kitty?"

"Little missie she go to lide allee same Mistel Clayt," lied the loyal Jim Toy, well knowing that at that moment the object of Turner's search was standing by the corral crooning to Geronimo in a sweet low voice that same negro melody she had heard Clayt sing to him for many hours.

Turner's face was wreathed with smiles as he went back to the phone. There was a clear note of joy in his voice as he said: "Sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Catherton, but she's gone riding with an old friend of hers, Clayt Matthews. You saw him the day he creased the outlaw horse."

Catherton swore and snapped up the receiver.

Turner turned back to light his pipe. There was a look of great contentment in his eyes.

Clayt was talking to Wing the next morning when Bandy came slouching to the house and asked for his time. Neither the owner of the Lazy W nor his foreman asked any questions. Clayt pulled out his time book, figured up the balance, and Wing wrote out a check.

"Now, what do you suppose he's goin' to do?" asked Wing, after the man had left.

"He's goin' to be a dude herder, so I've been told," said Clayt, laughing. "There's a dude down here at the summer resort that's afraid to ride around the country alone, and I understand he's hired Bandy to go with him as a bodyguard."

"How's your horse comin' along?" Wing asked.

"He'll be a regular pet pretty soon. I'm bringin' him home to-day." Clayt could not have told why he was so happy

that bright summer morning as he jogged over the well-worn trail to the K T Ranch. He had not noticed the young birds for a week or two, and he stopped at the edge of a little stream to watch a mother grouse soberly leading a small covey into the protection of a gooseberry bush. Clayt laughed heartily at the comical actions of the birds, and rode on to the corral.

Geronimo neighed when he saw the cowboy, and hurried to the crack in the corral, peering through in the manner that always tickled Clayt immensely.

Clayt unlocked the padlock and opened the gate to the round corral. Geronimo came to him at once to be rubbed and petted. Clayt heard the gate to the outer, or larger, corral squeak, but did not even look around, thinking that Turner was coming to see the horse. He turned quickly enough, however, when a soft voice said:

"Clayt, are you still mad at me?"

He shut the gate almost in the face of the horse. "Why, no, honey, I reckon I wasn't never mad at you! What do you mean?"

"I've been awful nasty," Kitty admitted. "I guess I was sort o' crazy ever since I got in with the crowd I met at the Stock Show."

"That's all right. I never wanted to keep you from havin' a good time. I couldn't ask you to marry me till I had money enough to stock my ranch. It wouldn't have been fair to try to keep you from goin' with somebody else."

"Bu-but I want you to ask me." Kitty began to cry. Of course, Clayt had to put his arm around her to comfort her, and they were standing in this position when a horse galloped up and stopped at the gate of the big corral.

"Why, it's Catherton!" said Kitty. "What can he want here? I refused to talk to him last night."

Clayt's heart leaped. "You mean that it's all off between you and him?"

"It most certainly is," said the girl.

Catherton had left his horse outside and came into the big corral where they stood. He came toward them, his face purple with rage and hatred.

"You interfering meddler," he cried at Clayt. "You insulted me the other day when I was armed, knowing that I had no chance to draw against you. Now I come to you unarmed and I dare you to lay off those big guns, you coward!"

Clayt never felt less like fighting in his life. Kitty's sweet confession had made him feel at peace with all the world. He would have shaken hands with Catherton if the man had offered to be friendly.

"So you want to fight me with your hands, do you?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yes, unless you're afraid to fight that way."

Clayt unbuckled his belts and tossed them into the corner of the corral. "No, I don't exactly calculate to be afraid of you."

"Then I'll give you the whipping of your life," snarled Catherton, and snapped a blow for the cowboy's jaw that was intended for a knockout. Clayt ducked and managed to avoid the blow, but he understood the trick now. Catherton was a skillful boxer, and knowing that Clayt could not possibly compete with him, he had laid this trap to get him unarmed and then to beat him to death.

Kitty crouched close to the gatepost of the round corral. Here she was out of danger of the fighting men, and almost hidden from view.

Clayt was familiar enough with ring fighting to realize that he was in the hands of a master. Catherton was not only skillful, but his month of range life had removed any superfluous weight. He fought a coldly calculating battle, and Clayt knew that only by some lucky chance could he hope to live through the contest. There was not the slightest doubt about Catherton's intention to kill him.

Cowboys' lives are a succession of

quick decisions, and long training enabled Clayt to see further into Catherton's plans than the man suspected. So far, Catherton had not landed a dangerous blow, but he attributed his inability to hit Clayt's jaw to the man's natural quickness and coolness. He did not know that in the first five seconds of the fight Clayt had mapped out a plan which he was following absolutely, regardless of several openings that Catherton in his rage and overconfidence gave him.

Clayt realized that his only hope lay in a defense battle. If he forgot himself for an instant and attempted to knock Catherton out, the man's skill would instantly enable him to land the one needful blow.

Enraged by his inability to hit Clayt's jaw, Catherton threw caution to the winds and fought like a maniac, and in the exact proportion that Catherton became excited, Clayt cooled. His judgment became clearer and he saw that he could protect himself until Catherton's frantic efforts had worn him out. Then —well, Clayt would see when the time came.

Kitty saw a grin of self-confidence spread over Clayt's features, and terrible though the unequal struggle was, she gained a moment's courage. Then she looked past the fighter, to see Bandy standing inside the corral, two guns swung well below his hips and both holsters tied down with buckskin thongs. Kitty knew very well that skillful gunmen never tied their holsters down except when they expectd to be forced to draw against men as fast as themselves. She realized now her own immediate danger and the villainy of the plot to kill Clayt.

If Clayt succeeded in his fight with Catherton, still he would not be permitted to live; by their ruse the two tricksters had him disarmed and at their mercy and, with Clayt out of the way, Kitty would be helpless before Catherton and Bandy. She tried to scream for Jim Toy, as she had done the day before, but her vocal cords were dry from fright, and she could not utter a sound. She could hear the heavy breathing of the fighters, and at lurid intervals an oath from Catherton as he tried in vain to land a knockout to Clayt's jaw. Her terror increased as she saw a deep cut over Clayt's left eye.

Bandy had walked to the center of the corral. If he came ten feet farther he must certainly see her, and Kitty feared Bandy for herself even more than she feared for Clayt. She caught hold of the gate for support to keep from falling, and her hand touched the smooth, round peg which held the gate shut. Her eyes widened as she remembered what her father had told her the night before about Geronimo, the outlaw—that he was a one-man horse and would still attack any one except Clayt.

Dare she turn this red demon loose in the big corral? Would the horse be able to distinguish between friend and foe? How could he recognize Clayt, covered as he was with dust, and wounded? Would not the scent of blood make the horse still more furious? She heard the jingle of a spur and looked toward Bandy. He had seen her and was coming, an evil grin on his swarthy face. Kitty would rather have faced a dozen outlaw horses than this awful creature. Holding onto the gate with her left hand, she pulled the peg out with her right and pushed with all her might.

As the gate swung open, Geronimo, the outlaw horse, stepped into the opening. He had wondered why Clayt had turned away from him so suddenly, and now in the place of the man he loved he saw and smelled the man he hated. His eyes flashed with rage.

For an instant, Bandy was too terrified to move. The horse charged, his great bared jaws snapping furiously. The man jerked both guns and fired. Then he turned and started for the

fence, only to be cut down under the flashing hoofs of the enraged horse.

The shooting caused Catherton to glance away for a moment, and in that fraction of a split second Clayt landed the blow for which he had been saving his strength. It caught Catherton squarely on the point of the chin and sent him down with a crash.

Nothing is more dramatic than the rage of an angry horse. When Bandy fell to the ground under Geronimo's rushing attack, the horse leaped over him, whirled on one foot, and catching the lifeless thing in his teeth, he raised it and flung it down upon the ground as mercilessly as a terrier kills a rat.

Kitty, terrorized at what she had done in loosing the outlaw, had swung the gate shut again and was holding it from inside the small corral.

Clayt saw what had happened, at a glance, and catching his late enemy by the collar, he dragged him inside the round corral, shut the gate, and dropped the peg into place. Then, he sat down violently, leaning against the corral fence. Kitty started to run for water to bathe Clayt's face.

"Wait," commanded the cowboy, and stepped through the gate. He was crooning that same old song, "Run and tell Lige." The great test as to which emotion, love or hatred, should henceforth control the life of the outlaw was on.

"Come, pony." Clayt was walking toward Geronimo. Kitty saw with horror that Clayt was still unarmed, yet he moved confidently. There was about the cowboy that strong, virile quality of absolute control of the situation that was always one of Clayt's characteristics.

"Hurry up, Pomp," he sang in a low, melodious voice. Geronimo stopped pawing at his enemy and stood listening.

"Meet me at the gum tree
Down in the swamp."

Geronimo turned away from his victim and walked straight to Clayt, putting his head against the cowboy's body. He nestled close as if anxious to shut out the awful scene.

Clayt rubbed the head of the trembling horse and ran his hands down over the rigid neck muscles. "You ain't to blame," he said comfortingly; "anyway, if you hadn't got Bandy, I'd 'a' had to." He put his hand on Geronimo's neck just over the spot where the horse had been struck by the bullet the morning he was creased, and started to lead him toward the gate which Kitty now held open.

Catherton had recovered from his knockout and when he saw Clayt coming with the red outlaw, leading him without halter or rope as he would a well-broken cow horse, he started to run.

"Stop!" Clayt ordered imperiously. "Pick up that partner of yours. It's only an accident that you ain't hornin' into the spirit range with him, but I'm givin' you a chance. Now git!"

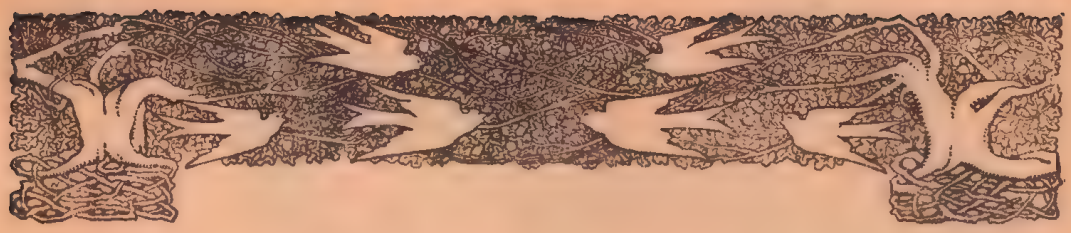
Catherton packed the body of Bandy on his horse and rode away. For once his dominating assurance had deserted him.

Kitty put her left arm up over Geronimo's neck and grasped Clayt's hand. Knight Turner, riding in from the range, saw them standing there, the head of the red outlaw held closely between them.

"Takes uncommon happenin's to make folks appreciate each other sometimes," he muttered.

THE TWENTIETH NATIONAL PARK

THE United States is fortunate in being particularly rich in national parks, and these have reached a total of twenty. Bryce Canyon, a beautiful section of Utah, was recently opened to the public and formally offered to the nation by Representative Colton.



BIRDS OF THE WEST AND NORTH AMERICA

The Phœbe

(Sayornis Phœbe)

THE phœbe bird breeds throughout the United States and southern Canada, and as far southwest as eastern New Mexico. It winters in the Gulf States and southward to southern Mexico.

Among the spring birds, the phœbe comes, eager and industrious, and apparently friendly enough with other birds to live near them. It is a small brown bird, fluffy rather than sleek, and has quite a long tail. Its breast is of a soft, creamy white. The phœbe has been the inspiration of more than one song and poem.

It builds near summer cottages and seems not to mind being around people. The outstanding feature of the phœbe bird is the manner and location of its nest. The birds seem to delight in building them in the oddest places. Because the nest is built chiefly of mud, it is possible to place it where there is very little support. Sometimes it is built on the joists of barns, or the crosspieces of verandas, under eaves, or in the crevices of stone walls, or unused wells. In some localities the phœbe is known as the bridge pewee because of its fondness for selecting odd spots in old bridges.

The phœbe lays four white eggs, usually unspotted, but not always. The young, as well as the parents, feed on insects, beetles, weevils grasshoppers, wasps, and flies. A few seeds are eaten, and occasionally wild fruit.

An interesting nest-building incident is told by a bird lover of a pair of phœbes who found themselves deprived of their favorite spot on a certain stone ledge. The phœbes go back year after year to the same location.

"After much inspecting of the piazza of a new stone house, the birds decided to build a nest upon the plate beside one of the rafters. Now this place was about thirty feet long and there were ten rafters notched upon it, and hence ten plates exactly alike. The bird selected the fourth plate. She got her mortar from a near-by ditch and made a trip every minute, carrying her load up a steep grade. The male looked on and cheered her, but did not help.

"As the nest-building seemed unusually prolonged, I went up one morning to the new house to see how matters were progressing. I found five nests in process of construction, all in different stages of development. I watched her for half an hour and soon saw how it was. She was misled by the sameness of the rafters—they were all alike—and whichever one she chanced to hit, there she deposited her mortar. So I hit upon a plan to help her—I put blocks of wood or stones in all the nests but one. When she came upon these strange obstacles she would hover about for a moment until she discovered the largest and unincumbered nest, when she would alight upon it and leave her load."

The Round-Up

COMES now into the firelight this evening to take the saddle and give you-all a little talk about how she tamed a mean one, Mrs. Veda E. Osborn, National City, California:

"Boss and Folks: Just slide over, Folks, and let a stranger make a few remarks. Have been a reader of the Western Story Magazine for quite a long time and like all the stories fine. My only regret is that I didn't start reading it years before. I also like the talks at the Round-up, all except those from Miss Mexico. My blood just boiled when I heard how she handled horses.

"I was born and raised in Wyoming. I lived on a big cow ranch until I was ten years old; then my father moved into town, and later he was a forest ranger in the Sundance National Forest. So I've had quite a lot of experience with horses, and I know that kindness goes a lot further than meanness.

"When I was fifteen years old, my father bought a span of horses. One was a regular pet, while the other one was mean and vicious—would bite and kick at every one who would go near him—so that I had strict orders to stay away from him. Daddy thought it best to warn me, knowing my love for horses. But those orders didn't mean anything to me in that case, though I don't mean that I was in the habit of disobeying my father's orders.

"So I started in to try to win that horse over to my side. I had to work slowly and be on the watch-out every minute. Well, it took about four weeks, and in less than two months I was riding him eight miles a day to school. I could go out in the pasture any time and call him, and he'd come on the run and follow me back to the house. He soon got over his mean ways toward other people as well as toward me. So I'll always believe that kindness toward animals always pays in the long run.

"Well, I'll let this be all for this evening. If you like, I'll recite the poem 'Laska,' which some one requested some time ago.

"I wish you all great success in the future."

By all means, let's have "Laska," Mrs. Osborn. And we all certainly thank you for offering to give it to us. Listen, Folks

LASKA.

I want free life and I want fresh air,
And I sigh for the canter after the cattle,
The crack of the whips like shots in battle,
The mêlée of horns and hoofs and heads
That wars and wrangles and scatters and spreads
The green beneath the blue above,
And dash and danger and life and love and Laska.
Laska used to ride on a moss-gray mustang
Close by my side, with blue serape and bright-belled spur.
I laughed with joy as I looked at her.
Little knew she of books or creeds;
An Ave Maria sufficed her needs.
Little she cared, save to be by my side,
To ride with me and ever to ride
From San Sabas' shore to Lavacas' tide.
She was as bold as the billows that beat;
She was as wild as the breezes that blow.
From her little head to her little feet
She was swayed in her suppleness to and fro
By each gust of passion. A sapling pine
That grows on the edge of a Kansas bluff
And wars with the wind when the weather is rough
Is like this Laska, this love of mine.
She would hunger that I might eat,
Would take the bitter and leave me the sweet.
But once when I made her jealous for fun
At something I'd whispered, or looked, or done,
One Sunday in San Antonio to a glorious girl on the Alamo,
She drew from her garter a little dagger,
And—sting of a wasp—it made me stagger
An inch to the left—an inch to the right—
And I shouldn't be maundering here to-night;
But she sobbed—and, sobbing, so swiftly bound
Her torn reboss about the wound
That I quite forgave her. Scratches don't count
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

Her eye was brown—a deep, deep brown;
Her hair was darker than her eye,
And something in her smile and frown,
Curled, crimson lip, and instep high,
Showed that there ran in each blue vein,
Mixed with milder Aztec strain,
The vigorous vintage of old Spain.
The air was heavy, the night was hot,
I sat by her side and forgot, forgot,
Forgot the herd that were taking their rest,
Forgot that the air was close,
That the Texas norther comes sudden and soon
In the dead of night or the blaze of noon,
That once let the herd at its breath take fright
That nothing on earth can stop their flight.
And woe to the rider and woe to the steed
Who falls in front of their mad stampede!
Was that thunder? No, by the Lord!
I sprang to my saddle without a word.
One foot on mine and she clung behind.
Away! On the hot chase down the wind.
But never was a fox hunt half so hard,
Nor ever was steed so little spared.
And we rode for our lives; you shall hear how we fared
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

The mustang flew, and we urged him on;
There was one chance left—and you have but one.
Halt, jump to the ground, and shoot your horse;
Crouch under his carcass and take your chance,
And if the steers in their frantic course
Don't batter you both to pieces at once,
You may thank your star: if not, good-by
To the quickening kiss and the long-drawn sigh,
And the open air, and the open sky
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande.

The cattle gained on us just as I felt
For my old six-shooter behind in my belt.
Down came the mustang, and down came we, clinging together
And—what was the rest—a body that spread itself on my breast,
Two arms that shielded my dizzy head,
Two lips that hard on my lips were pressed,
As over us surged the sea of steers,
Blows that beat blood into my eyes.
And when I could rise, Laska was dead.
I gouged out a grave a few feet deep,
And there in earth's arms I laid her to sleep.
And there she is lying, and no one knows,
And the summer shines and the winter snows.
For many a day the flowers have spread
A fall of petals over her head,
And the little gray hawk hangs aloft in the air,
And the sly coyote trots here and there,
And the blacksnake glides and glitters and slides
Into the rift of a cottonwood tree,
And the buzzard sails on and comes and is gone,
Stately and still, like a ship at sea,
And I wonder why I do not care for the things that
Are like the things that were.
Does half my heart lie buried there
In Texas, down by the Rio Grande?

Next will be "Hi-hope" Simpson, Elko, Nevada. Horses will be his subject:

"Boss and All: Well, there has been a lot of water flowing under the bridge since I first joined the Round-up. I was, at that time, in a California sanitarium, laid up from injuries received from a very onery, determined little burro. However, since then I've traveled over nearly all of eastern California and southern and central Nevada.

"During that time I cured my burro of balking, with the aid of a friend's team and a log chain around the burro's neck. Since then, I and Fanny gets along pretty good.

"And now, while I'm on the subject, I'd like to say a few words in regards to all the criticism that's been handed Miss Mexico and Miss Arvello for their opinion about wrangling horses. They deserve a lot of it, for they really go a little strong on spurs and quirts; but I don't think a Spanish bit is much worse on a horse's mouth than a scissor bit. I've seen lots of fine horses with their tongues almost cut in two from the use of a scissor bit. I have used many Spanish bits, and I think they are the best made, for an onery, stubborn horse—especially for those that are in the habit of running away or rearing over backward. As for me, I prefer a Spanish bit to a scissor bit. I wouldn't recommend either, except as a last resort, for they are both cruel bits to use; but, when I get a horse I can't handle any other way, I don't hesitate in the least to use a Spanish bit.

"Of course, the majority of horses can be broken easier if one uses kindness and patience. But I have found it best to teach a horse that I'm boss, and not to give up to it; to do so only adds to its stubbornness. Horses, in my opinion, are like men. There are no two alike. Some must be treated kindly, while others will give in only to abuse. So, in order to break a horse correctly, we must first study its disposition and act accordingly.

"My brother once purchased a seven-year-old bald-faced black horse, an outlaw. It had never been broken, and it was the undoing of two of the best bronchobusters of Idaho. I don't believe there was ever a horse born with a meaner temper and greater hatred toward a rider than that horse had. It had the habit of rearing over backward with its rider, and, so far, no one had even been able to do anything with it.

"My brother spent about six weeks, using every conceivable humane method imaginable, but to no avail. Finally, losing his patience, he decided he would either break that bronc or kill it. So I helped him saddle it up and put a Spanish bit on it, and then my brother got a good-sized birch club and straddled Mr. Horse.

"The first thing it did was to jump a fence and then try to dismount my brother by rearing over backward. Every time it reared up, my brother would crack it over the head and dig in the spurs. After about three miles of running and rearing, the horse had learned its lesson, and was, from that time, one of the best cow horses on the ranch. A tougher horse never bore a waddy.

"So I have found that to break some horses one must use abuse and plenty of it, while with others one must be patient and kind.

"And now, in regard to Miss Retter's inquiry as to how to break her Shetland pony, I'd say for her to get on him and have some one hitch a team to his neck and drag him along. It may stretch his neck a little, but he'll go before it hurts very badly; and I'll guarantee she won't have to do it over twice before Mr. Pony will be willing to go any time. That's what I did to my burro.

"Well, I guess I'd better quit, before some hombre hitches a team to my neck and faces me to go."

Miss Helen Rivers, who conducts this department, will see to it that you will be able to make friends with other readers, though thousands of miles may separate you. It must be understood that Miss Rivers will undertake to exchange letters only between men and men, boys and boys, women and women, girls and girls. Letters will be forwarded direct when correspondents so wish; otherwise they will be answered here. Be sure to inclose forwarding postage when sending letters through the Hollow Tree.

TO the north of the Tanana Hills are the Yukon Flats of Alaska, reaching down the Yukon for two hundred miles, north and west of Circle.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I have spent seven years on the Yukon and in the country along the Arctic Circle of Alaska. I went from White Horse, Yukon Territory, to Tanana, Alaska, a distance of about twelve hundred miles, in a rowboat. Folks up in that Northland call you a chechahco when you come in, but after you have seen the ice go out of the Yukon then they call you a sour dough.

It was the summer of '16 that I decided to see Alaska. I left Montana with my bed roll and range clothes, and a small grubstake in my poke. I took a boat from Seattle to Skagway, and on the boat I met up with an old-timer, a prospector who was on his way back to Alaska. He took me on as a pard, and at Skagway we took the train for White Horse, Yukon Territory, and there we outfitted ourselves with a twelve-foot boat and some chuck. We each had a couple of bucks and some silver left.

As soon as we registered and the Canadian police numbered our boat, we were ready to start our trek northward. We passed the Five Finger rapids two days later. The roar is so great that you can hear them two miles away. I was pretty well scared going through the rapids, but my pard, the old sour dough, seemed to enjoy it. There is another set of rapids five miles below the Five Finger rapids, with plenty of dangerous rocks, but the water was high and we had no trouble. It is all rough country along this part of the Yukon, with high bluffs most of the way until you get below Dawson. Just below Dawson several large rivers come in from both sides. There are Indian villages and trading posts at most of the mouths of these rivers, but we didn't stop at any of them, for we had grub and tobacco. There are hundreds of beautiful camping spots all along the river, and I would have liked to have stopped at some of them, but my pard was in a hurry to get down the river to begin hunting the yellow dust.

At Dawson we registered and got our papers changed, and then pulled on down the river about fifty miles. There were only about a thousand folks in that town of Dawson when I first visited it, and I am told that there were as many as eighty thousand in the days of the gold-rush stampede. In '24, when I passed there again, there were over a thousand empty buildings. We passed Forty Mile, at the head of the Forty Mile River. Here they are still mining the yellow dust at the head of the river, getting their supplies out from Circle.

We crossed the Canadian line into Alaska at Eagle, where we gave up our papers and registered again. Then we went on to Circle.

Between Eagle and Circle is where thousands of caribou cross the river each year, heading south in the fall and north in the spring. They cross there in countless numbers, and I have been on the Yukon boats when the caribou were so thick that the boat turned out twice to keep from running them down.

Just below Circle the river breaks up into five or six channels, leaving hundreds of islands—the Yukon Flats, they are called. The whole country here is flat, with lakes and swamps as far as forty miles on each side of the river, and these flats reach down the river for two hundred miles before the river comes together again. It is a good hunting country, with plenty of ducks, geese, and moose.

We were in Fort Yukon—that is where the Porcupine River comes into the Yukon—on the Fourth of July, and all the trappers and Indians were in town, celebrating. Usually there are about two hundred trappers and Indians at Fort Yukon, but when all the trappers and Indians come in at Christmas time and on the Fourth of July and bring their dogs with them, there is some camp! I think there were close to twelve hundred dogs, for when they all started to howling at once, there was no use to try to talk!

There are no towns below Fort Yukon, except Indian villages and trappers' camps, until you get to Rampart. We went on ninety miles below Rampart to Tanana, and then came back up the river to Rampart, where we remained when the river froze over. My pard went off on a stampede to the Koyukuk country that winter, and I haven't seen him since. I stayed on until the ice in the Yukon broke up that spring. Old sour doughs said it was the worst they'd ever seen—ice cakes five feet thick and ten feet wide were piled right up in front of the store and post office. As soon as the river cleared up, another pard and myself got a boat and some grub and started up the river on a prospecting trip. We didn't find a trace of color on that trek, and my pard finally took the boat back to town and left me with the grub. I stayed and got a raft of wood and logs together and then floated it down to town.

About the middle of August two prospectors came to town with a couple of thirty-dollar nuggets they had dug up on Canyon Creek, about sixty miles out of Rampart. Everybody got excited, and I got ready to trek with the bunch of stampeders. All of us had heavy packs, and it took us thirty days to make it over the hills and through the brush where a rabbit would have had hard traveling. Every one was trying to get there and stake his claim ahead of the other fellow. We all finally got claims staked off, and some of them went back to town and some stayed and started to build cabins. I stayed a few days and then went back to town to get more grub. But before I started out of town some of the men who had been prospecting their claims came in and reported that there wasn't dust enough on any of the claims to pay working them, and so I never went back. There were over a hundred claims staked at that time, but the whole country is open now.

Down the Yukon to the Arctic Circle trek the sour doughs of Alaska. They will yarn to you about the Yukon Flats, the Arctic Circle country, and the stampede country of the Yukon. The friend-maker badge will make you acquainted with the old sour doughs of the trail.

Twenty-five cents in coin or stamps sent to The Hollow Tree Department, Western Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York City, will bring you either the pin style or the button for the coat lapel. In ordering, be sure to state which you wish.

I have traveled many miles with dog teams and on snow shoes. I owned a team of five dogs for three years, and I want to say that any one who can drive horses can drive dogs. I have camped in a tent when the thermometer was sixty below zero, but you freeze on one side and burn the other while doing it. A fellow needs to be tough to stand the cold in the winter and the mosquitoes in the summer.

I'll be glad to hear from all you hombres who are interested in Alaska or the Northwest. Hunting? Yes, I killed five bears while I was in that North country.

GEORGE SHERARD.

Mobridge, South Dakota.

Old-time trapper.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: Who wants to learn to trap coyotes and foxes? I am an old trapper, and would be glad to hear from the hombres who want information along this line. Many of the coyote and fox men here make big grubstakes each season.

And now, folks, I have something else to

say. I'm looking for a pard to go into the mink and rabbit ranching. I have a large ranch in a fine location, and have a small start with these animals. Who wants to come out into the land of the sagebrush?

WILL TYSON.

Dietrich, Idaho.

On the plains of the Blackfoot reservation.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am not a bronc buster, and have never seen a hackamore or ridden a bad horse in my life, but I have ridden horses since I was old enough to stay on one, and at present I have a string of thirty-five horses on the plains of the Blackfoot reservation at Browning, Montana. My brand is Lazy Bar Diamond.

At present I have a camp at Geneva-on-the-Lake, four miles north of Geneva, on the shore of Lake Erie. Geneva itself is about fifteen miles east of Cleveland, Ohio. I have a string of spotted ponies at my camp on the lake. I'm fifty-seven, folks, and my riding isn't what it used to be a few years back. DAD.

Care of The Tree.

Lumberjack.

DEAR MISS RIVERS: I am working in the redwoods of California, and any one who wants to know about the life of the lumberjack who fells big timber and faces the dangers of the falling monarchs of the forests, just fork your pens, pronto.

JACK SHARP.

Camp 19, Casper, California.

"I am a sailor who would like to get letters from everywhere. Please send me some arrow or spear points, as I am starting a collection." Jack's name is Lloyd Archer, U. S. S. *Algorma,* San Pedro, California.

W. Kenneth Gerber, 2514 South Tenth Street, Omaha, Nebraska, wants a correspondent. "He must be eighteen years old, educated, refined," writes Kenneth.

"I am a young man, twenty-eight years old, just come to California from the East. It is wonderful out here, but I have made no friends and am lonesome. I drove out here when I came and will gladly tell anything you want to know about the trip." This is Charles Wilson, Box 73, Fair Oaks, California.

"This is almost a desperate appeal, as I am sadly in need of friends and have been wondering if I can find some through your department. I would never cease being grateful if I can find friends who understand and appreciate the bigger things of life. I would like them to be real folks and not those who follow fads and fancies. I am a normal, healthy girl and like books and music." This Gangster is Miss Levader Greene, Box 280, Glenmora, Louisiana.

Russell E. DeVore, Eleventh Tank Company Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, T. H., is looking for letters from anybody who cares to write. "I am twenty," he writes, "and have traveled twenty-one of the States. I have been in Canada, Mexico, Panama, and am now in Hawaii. I was born and raised in Dayton, Ohio, but don't any of you hombres get it into your head I can't use the shooting irons. I've used them from the .22 to the .30-30 machine guns."

"I'm fourteen years old, and I'd like to hear from some ranch boy. I've lived mostly in cities, but some day I'll be out there in the Western States with a cattle outfit and enjoy outdoor life." This Gangster is Alonzo Houle, 511 North Main Street, Manchester, New Hampshire.

Miss Mae Smith, 213 Third Street, Des Moines, Iowa, would like Spanish or Indian correspondents.

"I would like to hear from trappers, rangers, and cowboys," writes Herman Johnson, No. 1, Bourneville, Ohio.

WHERE TO GO AND HOW TO GET THERE

By John North

It is our aim in this department to be of genuine practical help and service to those who wish to make use of it. Don't hesitate to write to us and give us the opportunity of assisting you to the best of our ability.

Address all communications to John North, care of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

JUDGING from the questions which our readers are firing at us this week, interest in Alaska is surely on the increase. "I wonder if you can tell me anything about the Skwenta River country of Alaska, Mr. North?" asks Archie H., of Chicago, Illinois. "Just where is this region located? Is it possible to procure any maps of it? I'd like all the information you have, if you please."

Archie's queries have to do with a region that has just recently been explored. The Skwenta is a large western tributary of the Susitna River and drains an area in the heart of the Alaska Range south and east of Rainy Pass. It was only in 1926 that the Geological Survey undertook to extend topographic and geologic surveys into the upper portion of the basin of the Skwenta. Such an expedition is quite an undertaking, as Archie can well understand, in a new, unexplored country, where streams are too swift for boating and the only trails are those of wild animals. The surveyors in this case used the primitive methods of transport—the slow-but-sure pack horse and the boat dragged by hand through water too swift for even a modern power boat.

The task of making a map under such circumstances is so interesting that I think Archie and the rest of you hombres as well will enjoy hearing about it. The party in this instance consisted of the topographer and geologist and four camp hands, with sixteen pack horses and two tons of supplies and equipment. It was divided into two parts. The pack train, with four men, was carried by launch and scow from Anchorage, on the Alaska Railroad, to the west shore of Cook Inlet, to travel over a trailless country to the upper basin of the Skwenta River.

The other men, with most of the supplies, provided with a shallow-draft boat and outboard motor, proceeded up the Susitna, Yentna, and Skwenta Rivers, traveling by the use of the motor where that was possible and wading and dragging the boat by hand through the miles

of rapids. At the point where even this kind of boating was no longer possible the two parties joined and traveled southward up the Skwenta River into the very heart of the great mountain range. No human being was seen during a period of over two months, and even the few signs of native camps indicated that they were twenty or thirty years old. In September, when the approach of winter put an end to the work, the expedition retraced its own route to the coast.

As a result of the season's work, about seven hundred square miles of hitherto-unexplored territory were mapped geologically and topographically, and three hundred and fifty square miles, previously mapped in an exploratory way, were remapped and corrected. This work gave a clew to the positions and courses of the rivers that drain many thousand square miles of one of America's great mountain ranges, and to routes of approach to other unexplored areas.

The results of this exploration have just been issued by the United States Geological Survey, and in it Archie will find the geography and geology of the Skwenta River country described. The report is accompanied by a map on a scale of about four miles to the inch, on which the drainage and the distribution of the various rock formations are shown.

It is not the geography of Alaska, however, but the prospect for work up that way, that is interesting Jake G., of Baltimore, Maryland. "Can you tell me what the wages of miners are up in Alaska, Mr. North? Does it pay a hombre to trek up there for work? What are some of the other industries? How is travel through the country?"

We are going to answer Jake's inquiries by passing the buck to O. Z., of Latouche, Alaska, who has the advantage of being on the spot. "Now, Mr. North, as for people coming up here to work for daily wages, it doesn't pay unless they intend to stay here for some time," says O. Z. "At some of the mines the workers get five dollars and sixty-five cents per day, and the joy may last from two to four years. After the mines are worked out things will not be so lively in the central and western parts of Alaska.

"The fishing, however, will be good right here in this neighborhood. There will be six salmon canneries and about six or more herring salteries. This is a fine place for the summer. The placer mining in the interior will be good for many years to come. But, of course, a man has to take into consideration the cost of his transportation up here, which is considerable. Travel through Alaska is easy now, for folks can take their choice of steamer, auto, motor boat and airplane.

"I'd say, in closing, that the kind of man needed around here is a strong, healthy hombre, possessed of an inexhaustible amount of patience. The climate in the interior of Alaska sometimes gets down to below zero as low as sixty or seventy, and the coast section is one of the rainiest places on our earth. When the weather is fine, however, it is beautiful.

"Any readers of WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE who want information about Alaska can address me in care of your department, Mr. North, and I'll tell them about conditions as they really are."

Now here is a chance for you folks who are interested in this part of the world to get the facts at first hand. Send all letters to O. Z. Latouche, Alaska, and I'll see that they are forwarded to their destination pronto.

Before we stop talking about this interesting country we are going to quote part of a letter from A. A. S., of Pacific Grove, California, who has lived in Alaska. "I wish that I could make people understand conditions in Alaska and

how much can be accomplished," says this enthusiast. "I think all the lower Tanana Valley country will in time be cut up with small farms, raising mostly small fruits. Even cherries and early ripening plums should do well there, and with canning plants they could supply the world with the finest flavored fruits and vegetables found anywhere.

"Flax and Russian hemp will be one of the main export crops grown, as getting out the fiber will give the farmers winter employment and ready money in the spring. There is a 'know-how' to keep back too early blossoming of the fruits until the ice leaves the Yukon River about the middle of May. After that there is no danger of frosts until the middle of September, and during that time there are as many hours of growing sunlight as in New York."

Some folks are trekking to Alaska to try their luck, while others are making tracks for the Pacific Northwest. "Can you tell me anything about the opportunities for fruit growing out in the Lewiston country of Idaho, Mr. North?" queries this citizen of the Buckeye State. "I'm fed up aplenty on city life and want to get out into the outdoor West. Where are the orchards located? I've had some experience in that line and like the work. I'd like to know what you think about the chances in that part of Idaho, also the prospects for berry raising and general garden crops."

Sam will find the orchard districts in the main closely surrounding the city of Lewiston. However, along the rivers are to be found benchlands and in the creek valleys are subirrigated sections where some of the choicest fruits are secured. Perhaps the most profitable tree fruits in the Lewiston country are cherries and peaches. There is a keen demand for both these for fresh shipments, and the large cannery concerns are active bidders in the open market and are willing to negotiate long-term contracts for these crops. There are also great areas devoted to apples, and large shipments are made annually from the several packing establishments.

Sam can easily combine the growing of tree fruits with the raising of berries, melons, lettuce, spinach, and general garden crops. Strawberries are produced in large quantities and are marketed at outside points in car lots. The area devoted to melon production would approximate one thousand acres, and large shipments of this product are made. The Lewiston country enjoys one small-fruit crop that cannot be equaled in any other Northwest district, and that is its grapes. The cultivation of this fruit was commenced many years ago, and now considerable areas are devoted to grape growing. The choicest varieties of the European grapes are produced here and equal those grown in the most favored districts of California.

This is a mighty fascinating topic, but there is not space here to discourse further, so I am sending Sam an address from which he can procure additional information. Anybody else who is interested in the possibilities of the Lewiston country of Idaho can have this same address by asking for it.

RIVER SKELETONS

THERE is one kind of skeleton that not only never embarrasses any one, but usually causes rejoicing to its finder—and that is the skeleton of a prehistoric animal. Such a one has recently been unearthed in a fossil river bed discovered near Reddington, Nebraska. It is by no means a small affair, this ancient skeleton, and is attributed by the scientists to a mammoth of ancient times. The skull is about four feet across and seven feet long. The complete head weighs eleven hundred pounds. A little difficult to conceal in a closet, one would think; perhaps we may be just as well pleased that this skeleton is prehistoric!

MISSING

This department conducted in duplicate in DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE and WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE, thus giving readers double service, is offered free of charge to our readers. Its purpose is to aid them in getting in touch with persons of whom they have lost track.

While it will be better to use your name in the notice, we will print your request "blind" if you prefer. In sending "blind" notices, you must, of course, give us your right name and address, so that we can forward promptly any letters that may come for you. We reserve the right to reject any notice that seems to us unsuitable. Because "copy" for a magazine must go to the printer long in advance of publication, don't expect to see your notice till a considerable time after you send it.

If it can be avoided, please do not send us a "General Delivery" post-office address, for experience has proved that those persons who are not specific as to address often have mail that we send them returned to us marked "not found." It would be well, also, to notify us of any change in your address.

Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," et cetera, until you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

O'MALLEY, FRANCIS.—Your letter received. Nothing matters now. Please send for letter held at this office. Address Frances, care of this magazine.

RASKY, JOSEPH.—Last heard from when discharged from the army at Fort McDonald, San Francisco, California, in 1924. Mother worried. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Francis Fahm, 1207-B, Galveston, Texas.

DAY, SUSIE.—Taken from Oologah, Oklahoma, thirty-three years ago, by her father, Jim Day, when she was six years old. Information appreciated by Mollie Shinely, 311 West Maple Street, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

POTTER, MARY.—Left Chambersburgh, Pennsylvania, the latter part of 1926, for Detention Home for Girls. Believed to be in New York. Please write to H. M. S. "Honolulu," care of this magazine.

H. A. F.—Please write home. Polly, care of this magazine.

ROBINSON, CHARLES or **CHARLIE.**—Born in Syracuse, New York. Married Anna Noel, from Toronto, Canada, about thirty years ago. Believed to be traveling between California and Alaska. Had two children—one, Muriel Lillian, is dead, and the other is a sick ex-soldier, who would like to hear from his father. Please write to Herbert Robinson, Box 131, Buena Vista, Colorado.

BROTHER ALBERT.—Last heard from in Mountain Park, Oklahoma. Sad news about brother Jim. Please write to your sister, F. H. B., care of this magazine.

BERRY, G. M.—The friend you sold rugs with in Dallas, Texas, is anxious to hear from you. Please write to W. H. W., care of this magazine.

K. L. H.—Everything O. K. Am heartbroken without you. Important news. Please wire, same address, or write to L. H., care of this magazine.

BABCOCK, MRS. WAYNE.—My letter to Big Springs, Texas, was returned unclaimed. Please write to Josephine M. Blank, 1721 West Sixty-fifth Street, Chicago, Illinois.

NAPIER, ELIZABETH, nee **PARMER.**—Born in eastern Kentucky. Lived with family named Hampton, in Hampton, Kentucky. Last heard from in Lexington, Kentucky, twenty-three years ago. Information appreciated by her son, James Napier, R. F. D., Ambery, Wisconsin.

BOIDSTON, MARY, nee **DENNEY.**—Her father's name was Mal Denney. She married a man named Boidston, near Fort Smith, Arkansas, about forty-five years ago. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by her sister, Louie Denney Bradford, Route 1, Box 84, North McAlester, Oklahoma.

JOHN B.—Last seen in Detroit. Do you remember crossing Lake Erie, on an excursion boat, from Buffalo to Detroit, about twenty-six years ago, and the girl you helped? Please write to A., care of this magazine.

HATFIELD, WILLIAM HENRY.—Last heard from, about thirty years ago, aboard the brig "St. Croix," sailing from St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, for South America. Information appreciated by his sister, Eliza Ball, Northwood, New Hampshire.

SHEEY, JAMES.—Born May 6, 1896, in Dover, England. Five feet, six inches tall, chestnut hair, and blue eyes. Was a shell inspector during the war. Left his home, in Los Angeles, California, some time ago to look for work. Has not been heard from since. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. A. B. Sheey, 340 West Sixty-seventh Street, Los Angeles, California.

PETRALIA, FREDERICK A.—Twenty-five years old. Five feet, six inches tall, dark-brown hair, blue eyes, and ruddy complexion. Last heard from March 22, 1927. Believed to be in California, Missouri. Information appreciated by his aunt, Mrs. Mary Loos, 2335 Howard Street, St. Louis, Missouri.

McGEE, SMOKY; THOMPSON, CHARLIE; PRICE, WILLIAM; PEARSON, ROY; VANDEVER, MACK; McANALLY, FLOYD; MOOREHEAD, MERLE, and **BAILEY, CURTIS.**—Please write to Sterling Mills, care of W. S. Boles, Route 3, Enid, Oklahoma.

WILSON, BERT.—Five feet, eight inches tall, blue eyes, and dark hair. Was in Dayton, Ohio; St. Louis, Missouri; and Dallas, Texas, in 1924. Last heard from in Houston, Texas, in 1925. Have very important news for him. Please write to June and Billie, care of this magazine.

JOHNSON, CAPTAIN M. L.—Last heard from in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Received your letter, but my answer was returned. Please write again to Mrs. Edward J. Bayliss, Jr., 180 Franklin Street, Portland, Maine.

WHITE, MRS. MARIAN, nee **McLAREN, ANN HIGGINS,** and **EARL CREIGHTON.**—Please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

GRAYCE, PURYEAR.—Owned a hotel at 131 North Adams Street, Peoria, Illinois, during the World War. Information appreciated by a friend, L. I., care of this magazine.

HOLM, or **HOLMES, MARTIN.**—Born in Pernau, Russia. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1914. Information appreciated by his cousin, Johannes Tilbus, 1440 Leland Avenue, Bronx, New York.

ADAMS, EDWARD CLAYTON.—Last known address was 104 Duerstien Street, Buffalo, New York. Information appreciated by his Mother, care of this magazine.

MATLER, DAN M.—What has happened? Please write to the girl you knew in Tennessee, M., care of this magazine.

MILLER, RUSSELL C.—Last heard from in Boston, Massachusetts, in March, 1927. Information appreciated by Mrs. Bessie Conner, Uniontown, Pennsylvania.

JOHNSTON, OTIS.—Last heard from in Limestone County, Texas. Information appreciated by his wife's niece, Mrs. Lillian Hornsby, 3709 Runnels Avenue, Houston, Texas.

H. R.—Life is not worth while without you. Please write to J. G., or to Nellie C., at Gauley Bridge, West Virginia.

SERCY, DAN P.—Twenty years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, blue eyes, and light-brown hair. Was in Company C, Thirty-fifth Infantry, Schofield Barracks, Honolulu, Hawaii, in 1927-28. Last heard from in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by an old buddy, Carl Titus, Twelve Points Post Office, Terre Haute, Indiana.

GIBSON.—My grandfather, Nathan Gibson, was born in Randolph County, North Carolina, in 1928. His father and mother were Johnson and America Gibson. His mother later married a man by the name of Buller, and lived at South Bend, Indiana, in 1850, when Nathan Gibson went West. Nathan had a half brother, named Lindsay Gibson, who served in the Civil War, and a half sister, Mandy Kelly. Information concerning either of these people appreciated by Roy W. McGee, 591 Mary Street, Portland, Oregon.

VASSALO, SAM.—Left home, at 304 East Twenty-ninth Street, New York City, nine years ago. His sisters are married now and wish to see him. His mother is very ill and needs him. Information appreciated by Fede, care of this magazine.

MUNSAVAGE, IGNATIUS.—Was in the army and last heard from in Phoenix, Arizona, four years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, F. V. Munsavage, Wildwood Terrace, Mountain Top, Pennsylvania.

QUINN, DAVID S.—Last heard from in Washington, D. C. Please write to your pal of Key West, Florida. Bill H., care of this magazine.

CROW, KATHERINE.—Last heard from in Iron Mountain, Michigan, in 1892. Information concerning her or her children appreciated by J. Haynes, 710 West Seventeenth Street, Los Angeles, California.

SUMERVILLE, or **SOMERS, CHARLES.**—Last seen in Detroit, Michigan, in 1928. Information appreciated by Mrs. Sumerville, 403 North Poplar Grove Street, Baltimore, Maryland.

HARRIS, JACK.—Married Esther Phillips about thirty years ago. Has not been heard from for twenty-nine years. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. Olive Harris Manley, Haileyville, Oklahoma.

CLEARY, HERBERT.—Forty-six years old. Last heard from in Texas, about twenty-five years ago. Believed to be in California. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. V. Henkle, 10518 Tabor Street, Los Angeles, California.

GIBSON, JOHN.—Sergeant in the Fifth Cavalry. Was on special duty with the R. E. C., at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in 1921 and 1922. Remember the day you were discharged, and we went to San Antonio? You went from there to El Paso, to wait for me. Please write to an old buddy, Lester Hoffman, Pelican City Boarding House, Pelican City, Oregon.

MORTON, HARRIS GORDON.—Last heard from in August, 1927. Father is very ill. Please write to Kelly Morton, 501 Church Street, Nashville, Tennessee.

GRANT, D.—From Texas. Do you remember Brawley, California, in 1927? Please write to your old pal, SI, care of this magazine.

GASPER, IDA, FRANK, SULLU, and EVA.—Children of George F. Gasper. Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in 1906. Information appreciated by Charles Gasper, Labor Temple, Room 210, Maple Avenue, Los Angeles, California.

BLACK, IRA.—Married Martha in Texarkana, Texas, January 15, 1928. Why did you leave so suddenly? I loved you and trusted you. I am very unhappy. Please write to Martha, care of this magazine.

WEIDMANN, JACOB.—Seventy years old. Five feet, five inches tall. Last seen in Chicago, in 1904. Information appreciated by his daughter, Mrs. L. Ambs, 190 Fort McCamby Street, Battle Creek, Michigan.

GROGAN, HARRY.—Five feet, seven inches tall, light hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Weighs about one hundred and forty-five pounds. Last seen in San Diego, California, in June, 1928. Believed to be in New York or New Jersey. Information appreciated by W. H. G., care of this magazine.

PREVALLE, WILBUR.—Please write to your old friend, Henry Rosenkranz, Yorktown Heights, New York.

BAKER, JACK.—Last heard from in Borger, Texas, in April, 1927. Information appreciated by W. E. Baker, Route 4, Box 2A, Wichita Falls, Texas.

BROWN, WILLIAM A.—Five feet, eight inches tall, dark hair, and brown eyes. Served in the Eleventh Cavalry, Troop M, during the World War. Have important news about Bill. Please write to Bill's Sister, care of this magazine.

MAINGAULT.—Would like to hear from any one of this name. Address W. P. M., care of this magazine.

DRAGOO, M. O. and JACK.—My father and brother. Last address was, in July, 1927, 903 Durham Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma. Believed to have gone to Minot, North Dakota. Information appreciated by Mrs. G. E. Fisher, 158-62 North West Fifth Street, Miami, Florida.

GANO, KENNETH JAMES.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, eleven inches tall, slender, brown hair and eyes. When last heard from, in September, 1924, was working at a filling station, for a man named Thomley, in Los Angeles, California. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Hattie Gano, R. F. D. 2, Hebron, Ohio.

MURPHY, JAMES A. H.—Left Hamilton, Ontario, in May, 1928, en route for Detroit, Michigan. Information appreciated by his brother, William Murphy, 802B Third Street, Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada.

HARVEY, VICTOR WILLIAM.—Fifty years old. Left Australia for America, in February, 1927. Heard from in San Francisco, California, and in New York. Information appreciated by L. Orchard, 8 Junction Street, Preston, Victoria, Australia.

CAMINO, CARLOS.—Spanish. Formerly of Lima, Peru, South America. When last heard from was attending the Northern University, at Lima, Ohio. Do you remember the trip between Marietta and Canton, Ohio, two years ago, when you were returning to school, after spending Easter holidays at Williamstown, West Virginia? Please write to Sparkle, care of this magazine.

KOPPE, GUS.—Please write to Ruth Horn, Box 599, Kansas City, Missouri.

McDANIELS, GORDON HICKS.—Formerly of Dallas, Texas. At one time was on the U. S. S. "Tennessee." Last heard from in Seattle, Washington. Information appreciated by H., care of this magazine.

PATTERSON, EARL W.—Last heard from in San Francisco, California, in November, 1928. Information appreciated by Sister, care of this magazine.

CRANSTON, MRS. MINNIE, nee **BRYSON.**—Last heard from in Nevada. Information appreciated by her son, Bert Cranston, 1012 Leland Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

D. L. P.—You are forgiven. Have settled with Cork and Bond. Please write to H. P., care of this magazine.

JACK.—No matter what happened, I love you. Sugar and son miss you. Please write to Retta, care of this magazine.

McCANN, MAGGIE MAY, and GROTWOLD, ESTHER ROOSEFELT.—My daughters. Maggie was born at the Lancaster County Hospital, Lancaster City, Pennsylvania, thirty years ago. She was adopted from there when she was three years old. Esther was born in a hospital in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and was adopted from there when she was four years old. I was very ill at the time and unable to look after my children. Information appreciated by Mrs. Mary K. Brown, 1022 North Adams Street, Peoria, Illinois.

PACTON, DANIEL.—About eighteen years old. Blond hair and blue eyes. Worked on a farm near Austin, Minnesota. Please write to your sister, Mary Kinann, 1509 Eleventh Avenue South, Fargo, North Dakota.

CARLISLE, A. E.—Please come home or write to Mother, care of this magazine.

LYONS.—Would like to hear from relatives of Thomas Lyons. He is nearly seventy years old, and in poor health. Was born in Boston, Massachusetts, and left there at the age of seventeen. Please write to Reader, care of this magazine.

KING, PATRICK.—Twenty-nine years old. Five feet, seven inches tall, black hair, and blue eyes. Left Scranton, Pennsylvania, nine years ago. Information appreciated by his mother, Mrs. Michael Art King, 2905 Pittston Avenue, Scranton, Pennsylvania.

J. R. O., JACKIE.—Important. Something you will want to know. Please write to D. J. O., Machie, care of this magazine.

LAUER, A. H.—Last heard from in Philadelphia, in 1918. Information appreciated by Horace T. Newcomb, 381 Cumberland Street, Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

DEFFENBAUGH, CLIFFORD TROUPE.—Have always felt that there was a mistake in the report of your accidental death. If you are living, please write to Mother, care of this magazine.

HOLCOMB, MARSHALL.—Twenty-five years old. Disappeared in the fall of 1927. Red hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. Five feet, eight inches tall, and weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds. Has a diagonal scar on left forearm, about four inches long. Information appreciated by his brother, G. D. H., care of this magazine.

E. A. S.—Anxious to hear from you. I do. Please write to the same address or to Tom, care of this magazine.

LOPEZ, MARCUS.—Do you remember me? If so, please write to Carrie Swain, 920 Nicholson Street, Houston, Texas.

KING, PETER.—Last heard from in Montreal, Canada, twenty years ago. Information appreciated by his brother, William King, 8 Walton Street, Birkenhead, Cheshire, England.

KERRILL, GEORGE.—Wife's name was Flora. Was in the First Field Artillery, stationed at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Information appreciated by Marie, care of this magazine.

DROSZEZ, EDWARD.—Last heard from in Columbus, Michigan, seven years ago. Mother is sick and wants to hear from you. Please write to John Droszez, 912 Elston Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

WALKER, FRANK M.—Of Seattle, Washington. Please write to your old friend, W. S. Martin, care of this magazine.

GRAY, BEN HARRY.—Son of C. B. Gray, of Anderson, Indiana. Five feet, eight inches tall, black hair, and blue eyes. Last heard from in Idaho, about three years ago. Mother is ill. Please write to your brother, Daniel Madison Gray, 1424 East Twenty-second Street, Anderson, Indiana.

HIBSCH, or KAUFFMAN, MRS. ROSE.—Light hair and blue eyes. Last heard from in Chicago, Illinois, in 1917. Information appreciated by an old friend, Mrs. Grace Thevos, R. R. 5, Box 75, Battle Creek, Michigan.

VERONICA M.—Have not heard from you since 1925. Victor is in Rossburn. Please write to your old chum, Margaret Buchanan, now Mrs. M. Wallace, 648 Simcoe Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

McCUTCHEON, CLARA M.—What do you do to Garibaldi? Please write to the Terrible Swede, Box 228, Augusta, Michigan.

ELIAS, WILLIAM.—Fifty-five years old. Last heard from in Washington and Idaho, twenty-five years ago. Information appreciated by Gomer Elias, 1732 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio.

POPPY, ADRIAN, and mother, MOLLIE POPPY.—Adrian was last heard from in Yakima, Washington, and mother in Lacomb, Oregon. Please write to Harvey, care of Pastime Pool Room, Yakima, Washington.

FLESCHE, EDWIN.—Important. Please write to Pal, care of this magazine.

In Next Week's Issue of Western Story Magazine

GERALDI IN THE HAUNTED HILLS

By Max Brand

Geraldi of the reckless heart, the dauntless courage, the flowing road—will that wild hawk of the highway rest happy by the hearth? Geraldi personifies the craving felt by every man, and every woman, for Freedom. *You* will be carefree, worries forgotten, while you read of Geraldi.

LET SLEEPING BEARS LIE

By Kenneth Gilbert

"It's plumb sinful to kill anything just for the sake of killing," said the old prospector. But the young man knew better—he thought.

IN THE CLUTCH OF FEAR

By Bryan Irvine

To be shown up as a yellow coyote—that was the threat that terrified young Sheriff Dunnaway. For he knew the charge was true.

Also Features by

George Owen Baxter — **Hugh F. Grinstead**

Robert Ormond Case — **And Others**

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THE GAY PRETENDER

By Judson P. Philips

He forged ahead in flying colors—this messenger of lies—leaving behind him destruction.

HER RIDE TO RUIN

By Arthur Mallory

In honey-coated words, he sealed her doom and sent his own life over perilous paths.

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